



DOOMSDAY COLLECTION

THE END OF WORLDS TRANSITION MODE

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*Dedicated to Amber, Alex and Wilson
Who left this world too soon
With the hope they found a better place*

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Foreword

The Mayan prediction states that the world will end on the 21st of December 2012, twelve years after the mania of the millennium changing and cries of “The end is nigh” and the so-called millennium bugs. But worlds end gradually, rarely with a cataclysm, and for this little planet at least there has always been a continuation of life - though not necessarily in its original form. The Mayans do not predict a doomsday as such, but more a changing of ages and as we stand on the brink of human endeavours it is obvious there are two ways in which things can go. The good and the bad are the flip sides of change. We are at a transitional moment for humanity; technology drives us forward to ever greater potential - and also gives us the tools to annihilate all we love and cherish.

Ends are rarely The End, if ever, but merely beginnings of other things. Worlds change, transform and grow into forms unknown by previous generations. The Mayan calendar marks this as a dawn of a new age, one which is shaping up to have life extension, digital existence and space adventures. Let's not make it one of war and pain, pestilence and famine. We are hurtling towards the singularity but let us not forget to take the time to love and cherish the cradle which gave us life and not destroy it in the process of leaving home.

This is a collection of short stories, poems and flash fictions about worlds changing. Topics range from the dark and disturbing to surrealism to futurological

predictions, in short it covers endings, beginnings, and transformations.

Stories

1. Survival

Classic Moments filled Nazwick's brain as he stumbled forward. The rain was heavy, thick almost and his hair was plastered to his skull-like scalp. The girl was there, equally emaciated with large dark eyes; the music filled up his brain, the conditioning. Moments, this was a moment. Her peach dress was soaked orange, and her head was devoid of any hair. She curtsied.

Nazwick smiled. It widened the rictus that gashed both their mouths.

Lightning streaked the sky and he thought of thorny blooms. Again the music increased in tempo and filled him; the smell of damask, of rotting rich sweetness surrounded him. He bowed and stepped forward.

'Would you care to dance?' he rasped. Her skull-like head bobbed and she held out a brittle thin hand. He took it. Fireworks exploded in his mind.

They danced a deluge, soaked and sodden and then trodden into the hallway of the mansion. The allure of her was strong but he wanted to fight the conditioning, he had not meant to ask her to dance. He was losing, big dark eyes in a sunken face, so vulnerable and pretty. She should not be this way. The Classic Moments thumped a war tattoo in his mind. Thoughts on humanity and love and life were entwined in a divine rage.

They held hands and squeezed what nutrition they could from the fungal mats they were given. 'What is your name?' he asked, hollow and dry.

'Ankra' she replied, shyly looking away.

'Ankra,' he replied in awe.

A creak stopped what he was going to say, what he was going to ask, what he had been programmed for.

The mansion mistress entered and the sound of the Classic Moments stuttered. He jumped up but the shape of Ankra had filled his thoughts, up even with out the music to sway him.

'It is at an end' the tall willowy woman said. She was more flesh than they but not by much.

'No,' he said, wondering at himself.

'Ankra,' he whispered, 'will you consent?'

She nodded; she was so weak, he feared even the smallest of movements now.

'Very well', the Mansion Mistress said. She stepped forward, maroon gown shifting, and grabbed his sodden hair, yanking it hard so his head jerked back. Ankra gasped. Something was jammed into his mouth and scraped along the inside of his cheek. Then he was let go. He danced a dizzy circle and knelt before Ankra.

'I will fight for you, I will fight for a world for a child, a child that can not be born from your malnourished womb, a child grown in vats that should not be. I will bring the world back for us. And if not? I will bring the meat of those who banish us for our offspring to grow fat.' Shuddering with a new fear he kissed her shining forehead with dry flaked lips.

Standing he nodded to the Mansion Mistress, who nodded but went to administer her duty in collecting cells from Ankra.

Nazwick turned; an old scared man wiry with survival stood waiting by the door. They nodded to each other and then the old man led the way out. He looked back once; Ankra was holding two vials in her hands and watching him solemnly. Large tears strolled down her cheeks. He would bring her meat, he vowed silently. Music filled him up as he marched to war.

2. World of Litter

The world drowned in litter and most of the people with it, but Jacko was a bit insane to begin with - the sort of person who got obsessions and when the world collapsed he was into origami, in a big way.

Whilst most survivors felt they had been plunged into hell, Jacko was in heaven - all that paper and thick plastic bags! Just right for folding. And so he did. He folded whole gardens of flowers out of magazines and newspapers, and boats out of plastic bags. Large litter created dinosaurs, roamed the rubbish strewn streets. And when the paper ran out, and the carrier bags - he simply moved on.

Until finally the world - or at least the bits of it he could walk to - was filled with sculpture instead of rubbish. As the historians noted centuries later, he saved the planet; it was a shame none of the governments had seen the solution lay in the hands of a mad man - they where too busy arguing semantics and ignoring the calls to re-use, recycle and up-cycle. Jacko did it for them anyway so all's well that ends well... Except that most of the human population of the planet had to be wiped out for it to work.

3. Weather Warner

Jessica Was about eight years old when they moved to the Village. They lived in a cottage on an old derelict farm. Min lived in a tiny cottage just over a hedge that had gotten out of control and shot up into the sky. Min was an old lady with waist length coarse grey hair that she plaited in a single braid down her back; the end always had some sparkly flower or butterfly adorning it. On her head were a variety of floppy hats in various colours, often these would have flowers or something on them too, but somehow they were not old lady hats.

Min didn't really seem much like an old lady to Jessica. She was tall and willowy, unlike Jessica's nan who was large and jolly and had short wispy white hair with red cheeks. Min's clothing was always made of striped fabric with the seams on the outside, long and flowing tended to be what appeared most. Even in the autumn when the rains started and the mud came, she donned a series of bright floor length coats with things like flowers on the pockets; they all tapered at the waist and made her seem even taller.

Jessica would take biscuits round that her mother had made and Min would give her a cup of tea. At least, she *said* it was tea, it was always sweet and smelt of berries and was often a virulent purple.

Min's house was full of bead curtains and cushions in silk patchwork. Min's smile was beautiful, even when she took her false teeth out to entertain Jessica. One day she gave Jessica a bag covered in tiny little seed beads;

the beads made up a pattern of the sea with creatures roaming the depths and the waves and sun at the top.

'Find me some pieces of silvered wood in the forest during your holiday,' she said, grinning. 'Silver, mind! Not blond or red!'

Jessica had promised and took the bag carefully home with her. That coming half term saw her family exploring the New Forest and staying with her mum's old friends; they all helped her find the silvered bits of wood for Min.

Min was delighted with the haul and gave Jessica a purse made of shells, 'Find me some small thin pink shells when you go to the beach next,' Min said Jessica nodded and with her father's help picked up a bucket full of shells. Jessica had been afraid of the sand worms so had to be cuddled for most of the exploration. But Weston Super Mare was the perfect place for such delicate little shells.

The presents and requests continued; plastic beads from Leigh-on-sea and pine cones from the forest of Dean. Quartz from Ben Nevis and slate from Snowdon.

Jessica was 13 before she thought to ask what all the bits were for, 'My Weather Warner,' Min said as if it should be obvious.

'Weather Warner?' she'd asked.

'Different bits will spin to tell you what will be coming, a storm, hurricane or tempest.' Min had grinned and patted Jessica on the head. 'If all the levels start turning at once you know it's time to hide in the cellar!'

Jessica had laughed and forgotten promptly.

Around Jessica's fifteenth birthday Min began to build a strange sculpture in the garden, Jessica's father shook his head muttering about batty old hippies and her mother had told him off and made him take a tray of cakes over. It grew in fits and starts over the next few years and then Jessica was packing to go off to university. She packed with care the funky clothes Min had given her, they were ones she hadn't dare wear around the village but she thought they might be good for university.

And then it was Christmas and Easter and Summer. And the cycle repeated and suddenly Jessica was coming home to Min's funeral. Tears streamed down her face and she found she had been left Min's house and the strange Weather Warner which was apparently finished and sitting like a rickety sky scraper. Jessica pondered selling the place and paying off her student loan but somehow it called to her and she found herself moving in.

'You'll go batty just like Min was.' her father had muttered.

'Shush you!' her mother had glared, 'that girl was always going to be a reclusive genius and at least she's next door!'

'What about grandkids though? That's what I would like to know.' he'd muttered in defeat and stormed off.

Jessica watched the Weather Warner and noted that it did seem to predict certain types of weather - Min had a

hand written catalogue of what meant what. Jessica kept quiet about this, though, as people would think her crazy.

Then one day when her brother was visiting with his wife and kids Jessica was in the garden. It was a thick sultry day and the air lay heavy upon them. Without a breeze, without warning, the whole Weather Warner began to spin erratically. Jessica watched in horror as all of the different layers, shells, drift wood and plastic beads began to spin. Min's words echoed through her skull as if the woman were shouting in her head. She rushed to her parents' home but when she said they had to hide her father laughed and started saying the house had cracked her.

He brother looked skeptical though her mother bit her lip, 'Min's Weather Warner?' she'd breathed.

'Yes Mum!' she'd said in desperation. Her sister in law was looking worriedly at the children.

Jessica grabbed the baby and ran to the cellar. 'Jessica, for heavens sake!' her father had called. But her mother grabbed the toddler and a hysterical mother followed them into the cellar.

'This is stupid!' her father called just as the sky went dark, her brother dropped the phone he'd started dialling and they followed into the cellar after a moments glance at each other.

4. Art

The Artists arrived on an unsuspecting Earth; they arrived in shining spaceships curved into weird and disturbing shapes. It would take the humans no short time to work out why the ships were so disturbing and by that point it was a bit moot anyway.

The Artists were sleek, looking as if they were made from shiny rigid plastic in bold shades of red and black, but they were flexible and their skin did not wrinkle or furrow when they moved. Their heads curved up like an overgrown gnome hat but it was all their flesh. Flesh that turned out to be as hard as armour plating and not brittle in the least. They were pretty impenetrable. Their mouth parts opened in four pieces but there were no teeth; they ate algae filtered from bodies of water. This lulled the humans into thinking they were safe.

Worries over plague were the initial problem but that soon died down as other species from other planets had come with them. They were welcomed.

Our first contact.

They gave the humans wonderful fabrics and jewels, selected an elite to wear creations they had made. People flocked to the fashion shows. People of just about every body form were required and all exulted in it.

And then one morning those who survived got up to find the streets painted in blood and gore, vital organs hung from the trees in various shades of purple, green and

pink, tendrils of fat where draped artistically over the branches. A garden of hands on spikes reached up to the sky. And in the town centres or general open spaces there where people some of whom where still alive, impaled on stakes arms and feet missing, the ends of the bone sticking out just so. These where arranged in tableaux, a family here, a couple there.

Bows of flayed flesh adorned park benches. The survivors retched up their meals and screamed themselves horse, then wondered in desolation amongst the gristle and guts of their peers. And then... then the tourists began to arrive, aliens of many shapes and sizes carrying what amounted to cameras and guidebooks. And then the true horror started; some of them commissioned art work from the Artists and the rounding up began. This time the victims know what was coming and all they could do was run until this latest art fad died a death.

5. The Actiman Cull

Metcalf stood back from the oily smoke. If he thought about the smell and what it was, he gagged; but he was the senior investigator in this mess and had to be made of sterner stuff. The plumes were from the incinerator designed to deal with foot and mouth outbreaks in farm animals, but the carcasses being loaded in where most definitely not animals. He chewed his cheek until it drew blood. Someone, he thought, someone high up had thought of these people as diseased animals. The feeling just would not leave him. It was supposed to have been an accident and he was to check and write a report to prevent it in future.

But of course it wouldn't happen in the future because they were all gone, including the women from the shelter hiding from their men, their little ones following them to the same mass grave. Metcalf's hands balled into fists. Such a waste - the teenagers from the mental health halfway house had mostly been affected too.

With a bad taste in his mouth he turned away from the piles of bodies awaiting incineration. The food in the soup kitchens was the only answer; his men were rounding up what was left of it. The lab would have results for him that afternoon. 'Sir?' came a tentative voice.

'Rose?' he said turning around. The young sergeant had been crying. Most unprofessional, but then so had he, hadn't he?

'Some of the food... some of the food, got into the children's home.' she was pale with bright spots on her cheeks. He didn't correct the term children's home, there was no point. He sighed heavily.

'Has anyone survived yet?' she shook her head. Metcalf closed his eyes and ran his fingers through his course silvered hair.

'Sir... ?' her voice broke. 'It looks to me like... like radiation poisoning.' She pushed the toe of her shoe into the ash covered ground. He nodded, that had been his conclusion too; but the only thing they all had in common was the donated food. Soup kitchens fed the homeless, shelters and children's homes often ran on donations too, as did old folks homes!

'Rose, check out all the old folks homes,' she nodded, 'and Rose send warnings to other districts would you?' The puzzlement was there only for a moment replaced by fear - This could well be bigger than one city, why had it taken them so long to spot it?

Because, he thought bitterly, homeless people die in puddles of puke and blood all the time.

It had only become apparent when the rats had entered the city to clean up the corpses. He'd had to call in the Army to help clear the corpses, there were just so many of them. Rose's slight shadow fell across his path once more, 'Dad?' she whispered, he didn't reprimand her, 'Dad the hospitals! It's in the hospital food too,' and then she was sobbing and he was hugging, her numb but pleased she at least could still feel.

He squeezed her shoulders, 'we'll get them, Rosy'. She nodded mutely.

She dried her eyes and drew back her shoulders in defiance. 'If it's radiation it will be easy to trace to source.'

He smiled with no humour. 'They'll have accounted for that honey, it will be dirty and mixed source; probably traceable to half a dozen enemies of state.' he snorted. Yes, he was that suspicious.

He went back to his office to read the incoming reports. There were scared people, clustered around the front of the building, screaming plague, screaming doomsday, crying and wailing. Some of them, he noticed, had the sheen and the odd one here and there had a nose bleed. Some of these people were dying and there was nothing he could do to save them.

The common factor was the food, donated food to the needy, so it could be that cheap contaminated food was being sold on the black market somewhere and a benevolent donor had thought it would feed hungry bellies as well as anything else. If so, that person would probably have committed suicide. He knew those reports were yet to come, the nurses and aid workers who would think they'd done it, the officers who had to watch a children's home die.

Eventually he got into his office, his gut churning on nothing but black tar coffee. This had to be deliberate; all the vulnerable had been targeted. His heart sank as he

read confirmation messages, every city and town, all of them - the same. It was a national operation.

And then he saw it, a red envelope. Gingerly, he opened it.

Metcalf,

Welcome to the New Solution
Now the world will be stronger
Now we will have only the brightest, strongest
Society has been cleansed

Do not fight you are part of it

The Actiman Affiliate

.....

It could be a hoax, people did things like that, and why sign it such if it really were the Actiman Affiliate, the global corporation? And why? Just why? But he was already punching the forensic team's number and the internal post's. This was genocide, this was a cull, why hadn't he seen it? He'd thought it was an accident cover-up - but this was systematic. The sick, the old, the poor, all those who rely on society had been... exterminated.

A white-clad officer took the envelope from him. He called the government; the coldness in his stomach told him he would be fighting them on this one. His life expectancy was now probably very low. Time for Rose and her brother to leave the country - he'd sort out their visas before he trod on too many toes. Of course, he thought bitterly, if the Actiman Affiliate were involved then there

would probably be entire nations writhing in slow languid death already, and if that was the case then nowhere would be safe.

6. The Namrok

Guttering wind had stolen her candle light only moments before; Bella stood hoping like hell that dawn was not far off. There were skittering noises in the distance but the worst thing she could do was run. She calmed her ragged breath. The Namrok had been known to attack those who maintained stillness but had panic attacks. She closed her eyes; it made no difference to the impenetrable gloom, but it made her feel better.

Ten years ago no one had heard of the Namrok. Well, not in a way that any adult would ever have believed. Ten years ago she had been a lab tech with a promising career but that was before the rift, before the Namrok had taken back the realm they maintained was theirs. It was a shame they had rendered electronics useless as Bella would have swapped her very soul for a torch. Her breathing sounded harsh in her ears; she trembled and caught herself. No movement, that was the key - they were predators, and without her flame she was the prey.

A frozen rabbit, and if the Namrok caught her a fate worse than dinner awaited. She swallowed involuntarily. Angry with herself, she opened her eyes; a faint bruising had entered the sky. It was getting lighter, dawn! She may survive yet!

She exhaled in relief and the scuttling noise stopped. They were listening now - they knew she was there, and they would be clicking at each other to pin point her. She wanted to scream, wanted to run. With extreme hardship she pushed down the whimper that pushed at her,

counting in her mind whilst straining her ears, desperately listening. Time seemed to stretch and she was cold, the roll of... parchment in her hand seemed to burn into her in contrast.

She had no idea if it was valuable or not, but they had just left it there and the flame should have protected her to her home, but there had been no lamps left and she had been too eager to get home and away from the dark. The scittering noise had started up again, they would be moving in a slow circle around her, trapping her, but the sky was pearlised with precious sunlight now.

Unless she was very unlucky she would survive. The lighter it got the blinder they got, and fear of light would drive them away before long. But now she could see their forms, large and shapeless, at the edge of a large circle; and there were a lot of them, seeming to condense out of the night, little grey points of reflective light - and the smell. Sweet, sickly, sour, rotting meat - it clogged her nostrils and made her gag. They rose in a wave. She screamed and dropped down into a ball as a long, flicking talon scythed the air above her.

'I'm dead' she whimpered, waiting for the next blow, but the sun was tinging the sky rose and peach and they were wailing in a forlorn and alien way. The danger was not past, though as they know where she was. She used the confusion to duck and dive amongst them, dreading the claws; few had seen the Namrok and lived to tell. Bella panted hard with fright once outside their circle and then she ran.

....

Bella was throwing up outside the Den, that had been too close, she had to stop this, but someone had to try and stop the Namrok. Viktor opened the metal door, with talon scratches all over it. 'Close call?' he asked, wrinkling his nose as she nodded and puked some more. He shouted for tea and warm water to those below and then took the parchment from her. 'This is skin...' he said, paling. She nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

'I will get Anna to translate it.' and he was gone into the gloom. She wondered briefly if she should have mentioned that the letters would be written in the victim's own blood. Her stomach flipped again and she sunk down the wall instead. There would be parties going out to retrieve more supplies, candles, food; that type of thing.

She felt a bit better after cleaning up and drinking her tea, Viktor was pacing the small room he called HQ central. 'Are you sure, Anna?' Anna nodded, Bella slipped herself into a vacant chair. 'This is not good, can we stop them?'

Anna hesitated, 'Maybe, I do not know. Bella may, though.'

Bella froze, 'Wha.. what's it say then?' she asked.

'They are planning on blotting out the sun so there will be no dawn to rescue us.' Bella's stomach flipped once more.

'They have some scientists held captive...' She was already nodding, knowing full well she would not be getting any sleep.

'It's my lab isn't it? They are are going to trigger one of the super volcanoes!' The others nodded. The dust from the eruption, smoke, soot and ash would clog the sky. It would become cold and dark, and in the dark the Namrok were supreme.

They began planning Mission Abort Vulcan.

7. The Home Fires

The swamps were filled with gators, poisonous snakes, and other dangers. None of those were what worried him. After all, Jeramy had grown up in these swamps; he knew the calls of the animals and the slipper-soft sound of an alligator. People were always surprised how fast they moved - even lethargic, they were lethal!

He punted his flat wide boat across murky water towards stilted houses. The grey milky wood of them, smooth and skeletal, was decked with fresh flowers, vines cut from monstrous trees around him. The flowers, fleshy and sweet smelling, would live for a few weeks, then putrefy into brown sludge over night - they were already dead, they just didn't realise it. Just like the inhabitants of the houses.

Jeramy tied the boat up and hefted himself up the rope ladder, swaying, feeling heavy in his leather trench coat and armaments, his hat trapped sweat on his brow - clothing unsuited for the muggy swamps. He had known this but they were his identity now, his life away from the infested swamps. His body remembered this world though, remembered daring to swing across the gator pools and licking poisonous frogs with his play mates.

He remembered cheering as the older boys went off to do their initiations and how he had been confused when his little sister Miriam had gone with them and not come back. How he had searched the swamps for her and seen the coldness grow in his mother.

The flowers, looking like dismembered body bits, hampered his rise to the platform. Drums were banging out a fast tempo that hung in the air. Every five years this came round, every five years, this would be the second since his own coming of age, since his own failure to become part of it. He shouldn't have survived the punishment for that failure - the scars on his arms tingled.

'Halt! where do you come from?' Asked the withered man before him, the milk teeth necklace he wore jangled as he rose. Mariam's smiling face surged in Jeramy's memory, Jenna's frightened one replaced it, sobbing with blood gushing from her mouth.

'I am no stranger here, Padre,' Jeramy rasped. Vocal cords did not mend well.

The priest looked at him, skin browned by the wind and sun that streamed through the trees over the stretches of murky water. 'I do not know you are you from one of the neighbouring homesteads?'. Jeramy shook his head. Others had begun appearing around him, little bare legged children, in tattered threadbare clothes. Women, solemn in age and bright with youth.

'Ah but Padre, you created me.' Jeramy smiled. His mother, old and haggard, appeared. His smile shuddered.

'Jeramy?' she asked in a whisper, how could she know? He face was different now, his voice, everything really.

The Priest gave a signal, Jeramy saw the men of the village edging in for the attack. 'Jeramy, our accursed son! You are back are you? You failed in your rite of

passage - banishment is the punishment! You should not have returned.' With a flick of his hand the Priest set the strength of the village on him. He sliced through them, indiscriminately knowing he was cutting down kin - but they had gone through the rite, they must die. The bile rose, anger threatened to mist his vision at the thought of his sister and how some of them passed that rite.

Women and children huddled around, splattered with their men's blood, crying softly. The Priest still stood, white with shock; he looked grey and dirty. Jeramy smiled, 'Exiled? He tells you all those who fail are exiled? And what of the girls? What does he tell you of them?'

Silence filled the room, except swamps are never quiet, and the weeping of children could not be stemmed - he didn't want it to be - a lot more tears needed to be shed - more blood to be spilt.

'He says they go off to the Dome-Cities to be educated and have a life we hope they'll return with one day.' One of the women said.

'Have any?' he asked knowing the answer. They shook their heads.

'Tell them, Padre' he rasped, 'tell them what you actually do with their children,' the Priest shuddered, glaring.

'I founded and saved this community! After the great war! The war to end all wars! There are no domed-cities, we are what's left - here in the swamps.' Whispers surged, fear had gripped these people.

'Then where do you send the little girls?' his mother asked suddenly.

The Priest stood, not answering.

Jeramy smiled lopsidedly, 'I failed the ritual because I couldn't stomach what he said should happen to Jenna.'

He spotted the woman he thought was Jenna's mother - her head flicked up from the child she was cuddling. 'He takes us to a cave at the edge of the swamp and then... then he takes the girl and gets the boys to do the same, after each had pulled one of her teeth out.' Cries went up from the women. 'I do not know what comes next as he slit my wrists and pushed me in the gator pool.'

His mother and the other women were all staring at the Priest. He smiled. 'But ladies the girls live on, they are with us still! I bring them back to the village' he said. More horror as they realised what the ceremonial meat was. His mother was trembling, she picked up the Priest's ceremonial stick.

'I have to keep the population down! We are the only survivors!' he said.

'We are not,' Jeramy hissed, 'there was one bomb, a team from the cities found me, skull fractured, drowned and half eaten - the world still exists, they re-built me, father!'

'Then why did you return?' the Priest asked.

'To kill the guilty ones, that's my job now, and all of these... *men* they had tortured a child to death! They had not said no, and worse they did not tell the women!'

Jeramy pulled out a blunt nosed gun and stood resolute, but he could not pull the trigger, the Priests eyes were yellow like the a true predator. His mother swung the staff with a sickening sound, the other women moved in, ripping the Priest apart.

Technically they were guilty too, but Jeramy decided to ignore that fact - just this once.

8. Doomsday

The dust settled on the Google Wars of 2012 on December 21st & the internet juggernaut's victory led to the Mayan doomsday - well, sort off anyway.

China, incensed at Google, decided to put all their resources into DDoS attacks taking out the economic hub of the western world right around Christmas and killing the January sales. They also sliced, bombed and generally messed up any peer to peer cables they could get their hands on - which was nearly all of them. They then blasted all satellites out of the sky, bar their own.

The world was in turmoil - no internet, no shopping, no TV. Mass global communication was down - economics ground to a halt, banking had stupidly relied on systems that were nuked by the DDoS attacks. Mobile phones ceased to ring. Financial apocalypse.

But Amy didn't care about most of it. The panicked doomsday riots had been scary but she had hidden in a storm drain and slowly worked her way through the tinned food she had stored near by. After the riots had calmed down and the police had bashed a few heads she had sneaked back out with her rucksack and filled up on food and clothing from the trashed shops. She went back five times that night and repeated the process every night until the shop keepers got their acts together and boarded up the windows and doors. She was very careful - living on the street for the past five years had taught her to vary where she came from and where she went too. She had caches of food and clothing all over

the place. If you always went to the same place people noticed - the wrong type of people noticed.

Amy was maybe 17; she wasn't sure and she looked older now, the elements and cold nights had aged her. She was thin but robust, nicely rounded by the layers and layers of ill-sorted clothes. And out of most of the population of the UK she had guessed the truth and was waiting for the invasion. She had seen the tactic played out a few times - once unfortunately on herself. The boys would follow you to your nest and rough you up a bit, rape you none too gently and leave - telling Ricardo, or Gary or Al where you were. He'd wait until you emerged from your stinking hole, all friendly and smiles, offering you resources such as pain killers, food and a warm bed to sleep in.

And then you found yourself hooking for him, fucking men three times your age to line his pockets; but you were warm and fed until - and this was the inevitable bit - he got stabbed or shot or ODeD or even arrested for something or other. Then you were back on the streets, having lost your edge.

This is what would happen now to the western world, Amy surmised, and then China would be heros and the populations and resources of the western world would be laid at their feet. For Amy wasn't stupid and she had seen the news reports before things got bad - it was unknown international pirates who had cut the P2P networks and pirates who had sunk the transport ships that bought cheap food into England. And that was something that worried Amy; England had built on its farm land, had forgotten how to farm; her mother, before

the paranoia got too bad, had explained the island's history to her. She knew there would be mass starvation soon.

Amy frowned and looked at her bitten fingers, with infections pussing next to at least three nails. There was that old World War Two bunker she had found in the woods just outside town - she got the jitters and moved her stashes there - a few a night, being clever about it. She had more than she thought, but not enough. She took a shopping trolley and broke into a ware house and stole medicines, then in another part of town she stole bottled water, then camping supplies and more food.

She did this for what seemed an age and the ice melted and the nights grew shorter. She went to different towns, always fearing that they would catch her, but cameras were dead, all relying on the infrastructure that wasn't there anymore; and security guards were recruited into the police. Then one night, with daffodils pushing out of their green pods, the sky flashed white. Amy was pushing a trolley of books from a library - she didn't know why she had taken them but it seemed the right thing to do. She was behind a building when it happened.

But she still wet herself. Blinded momentarily by the blast, she ran, and ran to her bunker, emptied the trolley of books down the hatch and scrambled in behind them. She closed the hatch just as the rain began to pour.

Panting, she flicked her torch on and hooked a car battery up to some LED lighting she'd nicked. She changed and washed and then sorted the books. She picked up a rather old battered book she'd found on the

librarian's desk - it obviously belonged to them personally
- she almost hadn't taken it.

It was called "Life After Doomsday". She had a feeling
she'd made the right decision.

9. Antrik

The sky had grown dark after the initial flare had rebuffed off of the shield that enshrouded the planet. And now they floated, a lost ball in the darkness, too far out to receive warmth from their dying sun. Energy from below, from within, geothermal, had kept them going in artificially lit cities. They had floated through space, through everything; and now at the dawn of the tenth age, they finally, after so many close calls, faced extinction.

Extinction of the mind, as well as the body. Religions had come and religions had gone in their past, but never one so unbelievably paralysing as this. A disease almost, the scriptures said it had come before and that it would come again. But many feared there would now be no next time, though many had left the cradle to which this dying race still adhered. Out there there where many many who had escaped and had never heard of the new age, of order born of chaos of the blood letting and the harmony of death.

No thinking was permitted now upon the darkly glittering surface; the world had slowed, a day so long, more than a year, and yet it still turned but not for much longer.

Time had not stretched. Instead, days had become epochs within themselves, some living lives in the half light and some condemned to know only darkness.

Such a world can foster many things. This one? It fostered.... Me.

I am Antrik of the House of Light Cone, and I shall awaken the world once again; show it the horizon and what is beyond. How can I be content to stay in the cradle? A cradle that is dying and festering from the rot within. I am a Remnant Human and I shall be the champion that throws us once more into the stars we see, those glinting diamonds of harsh beauty. I have looked upon the universe with eyes that cannot see my own world in its intolerable half light. The Crones offered me once to fix those eyes but I was prophesied; I was spoken of; I was dreamed off. My eyes are ancient from beyond this incarnation of our star. Eyes with apertures too small, and with colour receptors; and here I am blind.

A cripple on a world of the condemned.

Come with me and I will show you, you who invade my head when I dream, I will show you my world, I will show you in the waking for I feel you there, the pressure in my head and I know you are there to guide me, to help me in this final battle. The mind quakes have come and the Earth is finally dying. All but the Remnants fled for the depths; we must leave too or perish. Help us? Help me? I am a rebel in these parts, condemned to die slowly and painfully, unaware of self.

Come with me?

Antrik awoke, she had lain on the fungal matt for too long and the tendrils had weaved themselves into the heavy fabric she wore. A dirty brown, though she had no name for the colours her eyes perceived. Pale transparent skin, she was luminous with wild staring eyes, too large and dark in a triangular face and yet to her own people of

her own time they were small, small insipid eyes. Ghostly eyes of the past. The operation to correct them had been offered and declined. No matter, she was mentally unstable.

She was condemned to death; she was a thought criminal if only a third degree. The Regime where not unkind and she had light here, glorious bright light that hurt her eyes initially and would blind her jailer were he to look upon it. It was a blessed relief to her, never before had there been one such as her - a Remnant who was scared of the dark, who sought the light, who gloried in the thoughts of beyond.

Her thoughts went against the rest and this hurt, this hurt many and so they had cut her off and locked her away. She grinned with a small thin lipped mouth still infused with warmth so alien to the Remnants. Cold, and dark their world, the cradle rotted, broken distorted and yet they clung. But they could not silence her thoughts; she was different from the Web. She could not be buffered and blocked by the alloys they used in the prison cells, and the most delicious thing? They did not realise this, they did not know and she had been talking to others. Others the council said did not exist, others that had once been of this barren rock, others whose origin had been millennia before, based upon this same spinning ball before the end and the rebirth. Before the Religion had locked itself upon them and before the secular mania had hit upon the thoughts in an oscillating cycle of destruction.

Her own space to think, to grow, to be. It had been what she needed and now she was strong, and she was

calling them towards her, calling them closer to release her, to help her achieve her goals. Release the mind lock of the Council, destroy the Web and to leave this ghastly place.

She had seen their dreams and had spoken to them within the confines of the darkness within, she had shown them her world and they unwittingly and purposefully had shown her theirs. And there where a myriad of forms and a mish-mash of homes and yet all could hear her, all had come from here. This soil had nourished their ancestors, somewhere deep within they shared something no matter how many generations and mutations of self had occurred. Her small ears felt warm and wet and as she sat, a cold trickle run down each cheek. Her fingers, long and brittle, felt the sticky substance and she looked at a redness she knew not the word for.

Elsewhere in the complex that imprisoned her there had been a surge in the power and the shields that kept the atmosphere had wavered.

They were coming.

She would dream them so, and Antrik once more aly back in the darkness of mind and called for the destruction of the cradle.

10. Boundaries

The world crystallised round a thought, a mountain grew, quantised and grainy. 'It looks like Mount Shamish' I whispered in a voice that echoed pixelation.

'It is constructed from your memories' the ghost beside me said. Her voice was clear and strong but there was no reverb, the air swallowed the sound leaving me with a deathly after taste.

'Am I dead?' I asked.

The ghost smiled. 'You don't have to think like that anymore' I nodded but the sky was making my mind squirm. I could feel something beyond - a chittering. Voices of thought, not my own but pressing at my existence.

Feelings wrapped around me like ribbons, thoughts and snatches of songs. I tried to grab them back. Fear choked me as I watched the sky swallow them.

'Do not fret so,' said the apparition next to me, 'they are not lost to you, they surfaced from you and are simply being... shared' The ghost seemed more real as if my thoughts were being absorbed into her. She blushed and stared at me with eyes less transparent. A little crooked smile appeared on her face as if I'd blinked but I was sure I hadn't, 'I knew it!' she announced.

The burn of embarrassment stemmed my fear as I examined my errant thoughts, daydreams and fantasies,

every stray desire I had had for her... before and after her death. These danced in coloured blurs around her. A loathsome shame filled me and I fell on my knees, a sadness seeped into her.

'You saved me and I saved you,' she said gently, 'those rules do not apply here,' her voice had turned to a brittle ice at the end of the sentence.

'I saved you?' I asked and shocked my head, 'no I condemned you, I broke my own heart because it was what you wanted! I am wrong to have had such thought but love I can not control. My actions I could have'

She snorted 'a lot of those felt a lot more carnal than love'

I stood out of shock though the process by how I came to be back on my feet had blinked out of existence, 'You felt them?' it was almost a startled cry half anxiety, half excitement.

'Of course' she shrugged, I was dismissed by the gesture but an unease within was growing.

'You rescued me?' I asked at last having processed what had been said.

'Your brain was dying, they hit you hard' She was no longer making eye contact with me but staying into the distance.

I looked around me properly for the first time, 'I am... inside?'

'Yes... I controlled the cables' An image shimmered in the air, layers of curly hair, blood oozing and a cable of lights snaked around and entering thought the nose, my nose.

'I'm still alive!' I felt horror grab at my gut.

'Not in that body you aren't' she said quietly.

'No! Not possible,' I felt giddy as if I had climbed up the mountain too fast.

'It is' was all she said, infuriating me.

'But I am a Flesher! I have no implants! We're not even allowed replacement organs. This.... this is impossible' I was boiling with rage but curiosity was burning hotter.

'Fleshers still drink the water and eat the food. Implants can be ingested and grow in place. Don't get the rage,' she said calmly as if it were no more than an argument over her borrowing my coat 'Did you really think Virtualists would allow all that waste of life?'

My indignation was growing and I hated her, 'Fleshers believe in the WHOLE soul, you know that!' I spat, 'to do this! To force them to live virtually.... I should have helped them' I stood bleakly staring at her.

And she? She was still smiling calmly, staring away at the distance.

'You misunderstand, it is for them who ask, for those who cry on their death bed, for those who regret not having the implants.'

'And if they are right?' I asked acidically.

'Then such a creator will be over thrown by their own selfish childishness.' she paused, 'you refer to them not us?'

I hesitated and then shrugged, 'I would have liked better eyes, I was going to convert to a soft flesher once my parents were gone.'

'And yet your friends were not even born again fleshers were they? I always wondered about that.'

I sighed, she was right; my friends had been virtualists plus two AI's though even she did not know of them. Virtualists could be funny about Coder-Life more so than fleshers ever were.

'But I didn't ask, Jacks!' I said eventually.

'I know and I was forbidden to intervene, they will come for me soon,' she said quietly and far too calmly.

'Come for you?' I asked, fear gripping my non-existent stomach.

She nodded and pointed to the mountain; bits of it were breaking off and scuttling towards her. I felt a revolution, the system would attack her, destroy her.

'No, it will not do that... I will be... isolated' she was quivering with fear now and I felt helpless, I couldn't let

anything happen to her, I felt her emotions pulse into me, obliterating my own thought stream.

'Isolated?' I asked, 'you are part of the Collective?' I may have been a Flesher by upbringing but I was a mathematician by nature and the worlds of computers and AI's and the Collective could not have remained completely segregated from me even if I had tried and I hadn't, I'd sorted it out, hadn't I?

So juicy and forbidden was it, something to intrigue me. I'd studied as much as was permissible and stolen moments of what was not and gleaned as much as was possible for one without implants and a jack into the info archives.

'Always' she said 'even before... transition.' I nodded; that meant there was an awareness of everything else within the system for her, something akin to our ancestors' idea of telepathy. Jacks had responded to my thoughts, not my words, my inner musings, they were after all just information for the decoding. I felt sick.

'I thought once you were connected removal was impossible? I thought there was always a back up?' I almost choked on these words so blasphemous to me, the idea that a copy was you but now I was a copy. Surely that was what I was, it was however not all I was, I was... a ME.

'They can shut you down and leave you dormant or... or they can isolate you, oh sure there will be dormant copies of me which they may decide to release to process within the system but they won't be me,' she laughed, 'never thought I would have so much in common with you

fleshers!' she sniggered unpleasantly, it was tinged with mania, 'you see you fleshers were sort of right you know. Copies are new versions - new lives. That's why implants are so important, they are not just models of the brain they slowly become the brain!'

I shuddered, sickened to my centre of being, but not for the reason I felt I should be, not my Flesherness but the thought that an entity that had been amalgamated into such a pan-consciousness - how would it feel to be small and individual once more?

'You'll go insane!' I mumbled.

'Yes' she replied

'Why! Why did you do it?' I sobbed.

'Why did you defend the base?'

'Because you were in it! Because I... I love you!' she smiled and nodded.

'And you', she said, 'knew they would hurt you! At the very least you would have been Ostracised from your family' I found myself nodding though that description made it sound like I had thought about the consequences of the whole affair. Something I most definitely hadn't; the whole thing had been pure reaction, well all of it except conforming to Jacks' will, that I could have stopped. I could have sought help and easily found it, I could have prevented her from being uploaded. I had wanted to but it was not my decision to make.

'No' she said sadly, 'you could not have stopped me being uploaded, you may have thought you had if you'd tried but the implants, the bits with the important stuff on can survive the temperatures of incinerators. I would have just lain dormant until a recovery crew found me. She turned a too bright smiled on me; it hurt, she was more than solid now.

'What matters is that you didn't try,' she said gently.

I nodded, distracted by great distorted shapes that had reared themselves up and were cantering along the binary horizon. 'You can't let them take you!' I shrieked, grabbing her hand.

'There is nowhere to run' she said slowly.

A grotesque head loomed at them; it was sat upon a gelatinous mass. It opened its misshapen mouth and uttered light shafts, these seemed to be streaming into Jacks and she was pulsing with it. She turned to me and with a desperate sensation I felt the words 'I did it for love'

'Stop! Stop!' I screamed, 'I told her I wanted to be uploaded!' It was a desperate lie but I could not take this, I could not let her go but a lie in the Collective can not work. She held out a glowing limb to me, I clutched at it but it seemed such a frail in substantial thing.

'Don't leave me!' I hoarsely exclaimed, fear sliced my mind, this place for eternity without her... that... now that truly was worse than death.

A crab legged baby sidled up to me, 'Do you choose exile?' it asked. The tone was strangely echoey as if other words were being said but the idea of all the variants I could... taste, were the same.

'To be with her?' I asked my throat dry in a place of no water and no throat, my mind spun, 'I need' her I whined.

The creatures seemed to stall, to freeze momentarily and then they were dimming, Jacks was floating pulling me up. I reached up my other hand and pushed off from the non-existent ground and we were dancing in warm light that bathed us to the core. Fearful I dreamt of a kiss she smiled and touched my lips with hers. 'No boundaries here,' she whispered. I fell into her and we became a we, we became a silken moment of thoughts weaved and meshed, never to be separated. Horror landed us, 'The Fleshers' I cried into the isolation, 'They will destroy us!'

'No' she said simply, 'They do not have the eternities of within - time is different here. Plus there are back-ups'

'But they still could...' I began

'It does not matter' and she showed me time for us stretched through out the machine, eons in microseconds, eternities within eternities. We would live lives, extreme and subtle and the landscape of our thoughts stretched out before me. I wondered if I would resent the Collective intruding after such an isolation. Here and now and always me and Jacks were the universe.

11. A Wanting For Grass

Angular packed a bag of mega belongings, amongst which was the rag doll she had managed to bring from their farm. She had little memory of the place but what she did have was coloured by her parents' remembering. The cows' warm soft noses, the molasses stodge in shiny plastic buckets around the fields. Oh yes, the fields; she remembered them, longed for them in her dreams... *grass*. She wanted grass, its coolness beneath her feet.

She stuffed the toy in her bag roughly, angry. Generations they had been here, it was their land! Oh, not that exact spot to be sure, but they had been farmers on one side or other of her family for as far back as any of them knew. But the war had changed things, and land was needed for housing by the new regime.

The solders had come to the house, her golden house with dark beams and had told her parents to pack. They had protested they were farmers - farmers were always safe, people always needed food. A camouflage-clad arm had whacked her father across the face, blooming his nose into a bloody mess. Jess had taken her hand and they had packed things important to them and Benji. Mostly they put in blankets and toys, and the e-reader.

This had been a dangerous thing to do; it contained a copy of wikipedia as well as other forbidden texts but it was in the hands of children so all subsequent searches assumed it to be school issue. The e-reader was now packed in Benji's bag he was still only seven, the ruse

would probably work again, they hoped. Besides, this time they were being expelled from the country; some strange scheme. She was worried about it, so was her mum and dad. They looked so old, fingers blistered and burnt from working in the PCB factory.

But why uproot them again? They had one room in a shared apartment - the whole thing was smaller than the downstairs of the farm had been. The room had become extra oppressive recently as Jess just sat crying a lot and putting on weight. How she was managing this was beyond Angular, they had very little food; the Asian bread basket had folded two years before. Around the time the soldiers had taken their mother away to be sterilised, she had more children than she was allowed and it was only Dad's hard working record that had saved him from the mines.

'Mum, where are we going?' Angular asked suddenly; but her mother's eyes brimmed with tears.

'I don't know,' she whispered horsely.

Everything was packed within two hours; there wasn't much. The soldiers knocked and escorted them out at gun point. Everyone from the little apartment had hugged and said good bye just in case. Mrs Cheryl had sobbed and pressed a lavender ribbon into Angular's hand.

They were herded into trucks with too many people in them. She felt the sweat of those around her seep through her cloths, smelt the fear and bowel movements of scared animals. She wanted to run, wanted to be free and there was just a crush. Her father and mother where

taking it in turns to try and shelter them from the press of the crowd. Angular got angry, Jess was 15, why wasn't she helping? At ten she was too small but Jess should help. But then she looked at her sister and saw the fatigue in her face, so pale, sweating. Jess must be sick - she was sure of it - why had no one said?

Bruised and battered they eventually left the truck and a reek hit them; salty, putrid, rotting fish. She gagged. Another set of trucks sat before them, these ones were different somehow. It scared her and she withdrew behind her parents, holding onto Jess and Benji's hands. They were man handled into a pen, where her mother wet herself, they stood and waited - the soldier's guns trained on them. People from the other trucks came forward and handed over some boxes with a strange snake design on them. There were loud bangs and splintering noises as the crates were checked and then the solders were getting into their trucks and driving away.

Jess fainted.

People from the trucks ahead of them surged forward and surrounded Jess, Angular wasn't going to let them kill her sister - she attacked, the man with the thin knife who was standing over Jess. 'No!' her father yelled and pulled her back.

'They're going to kill her, Daddy!' she cried.

He shook his head, 'No sweet heart they aren't they're not solders, they're doctors! Doctors!' he cried slumping to his knees. He began to laugh and wouldn't stop. To

Angular's surprise they were helped onto the trucks and given seats!

The doctors looked her over and she squinted at them with suspicion. A lady smiled at her and gave her a t-shirt. And then they were getting off of the trucks, sky and sea and more putrid salt greeted them. 'What are they?' her father asked pointing to what looked like an array of long pine cones bobbing on the sea, glinting in the sunlight.

'They are your new homes, the UN built them, I think you'll like them though you will have to deliver your freedom cost.'

'Freedom cost?' Angular asked.

'You're free now, we bought you out but with a deal that we would provide the Empire with medical supplies now and food later on. You will be helping with both - out there in your new countries.'

With that they were bundled into boats and on a rather bumpy ride taken to see the pine cones. 'Greenhouses?' her father asked.

'There are traces and hydroponics, flower gardens and goats. We hope to get you bees soon so for now you'll have to pollenate crops yourself.'

Her father burst into tears.

They stepped upon the sea farm, large and gleaming, 'Mum?' Jess asked, 'will the baby be ok now?'

Mum squeezed her hand.

Angular stared around the vast room, it was like nothing she had ever seen before, her father was crying and laughing and shaking the aid workers hand. The man was grinning, 'I'm glad you like it! You will be sharing this complex with four other families I'm afraid so you might feel a bit cramped.'

Four other families? Angular thought, they'd just spent seven years sharing one apartment with three other families and that must have been the size of this entrance hall. At ten years old that was most of her life! She wasn't sure she liked the big vaulted ceiling or the incessant bobbing of the floor beneath her feet. Not that the apartment had been still but it only tended to shudder when heavy traffic went past - this... this was something else.

'Unless by some small chance you happen to have farming experience there will have to be a set up team - who will be arriving in the morning.' the man continued.

Her father was blushing, 'I was a cow farmer... before.... he trailed off.' the aid worker looked delighted - really? Oh fantastic - I assume that goats will be not problem then?' her father shook his head; he'd grown up with goats.

'However, you will still need to produce crops,' he said curtly.

'Mum used to grow wheat and veg and stuff,' Jess interrupted, the fifteen year old really was looking quite

fat and quite ill. Angular was worried; her sister had always been so full of vitality. Benji was holding the older girls' hands looking frightened, he had never really known the farm, he was less than year when the solders had come.

'Excellent, don't suppose you had hydroponics?' the aid worker asked.

'We had some, but not lab 'ponics' her mother answered, looking slightly glazed.

'Brilliant! I think we lucked out on having you as the first family on board this one! We will be introducing a family to each seastead to begin with, to get them all started. I will show you where the weapons are and how the bilge pumps work etc....'

'Weapons?' her father whispered looking ashen.

'There will be pirates - probably not in the first few years of the project but there will be.'

'Oh,' the family muttered together, but then how different were pirates going to be from the soldiers? And this time they would have guns!

'Are there fish?' he brother asked suddenly, he didn't really understand about the guns.

'No not yet,' the aid worker said, 'though the design has aqua-bulbs below it for algae farms - this will be important for base nutrients and water processing. The bulbs are

made so that we can attach fish tanks later - once our scientists have a steady population going, that is!

'Fish? Real fish?' her father said, looking wide eyed, 'I remember there were fish when I was really little, I think we used to eat them?'

The aid worker nodded, 'yes before the biodiversity crash people used to catch fish to eat - seems incredible now.'

He showed them this and that but Angular began to get bored, Jess and Benji thought it was a good idea to explore. There seemed to be rooms for everything, ones with tables and chairs and others with very large stoves in and far too many cupboards! And when the children looked they were full of tinned food. There were bags of rice and flour and so many things Jess seemed to half remember but Angular could not recall.

The Farm narrowed as you went higher; they were very much like giant floating pine cones, the aid worker reckoned it was to make them more stable in storms, Angular didn't like the sound of that.

Half way up green houses began to appear. Most had little in other than sacks of soil and packets of seeds awaiting planting. But right at the top there was a domed room, there were tables and chairs on a little plinth and some brightly coloured things Jess called toys. 'They're slides and swings!' she breathed as if it was the most wonderful thing in the world. Angular and her brother prodded them suspiciously. But best of all was what they where on - grass! Cool green, sweet grass. All three of

them stood bare footed and wriggled their toes drinking in the sensation.

Jess seemed to be feeling better, though she kept putting her hand to her stomach. They found their parents saying hello to the goats. The aid worker was filling in the paper work - though this was all done on a small device that looked like the e-reader they saved from the Farm.

'Oh by the way, there is no family size restrictions on these Sea Farms but I suppose you were sterilised?' he asked their mother, she looked sad but nodded, her eyes darting to Jess for some reason.

'And you're too young!' he said cheerfully, Jess burst into tears. The aid worker looked startled.

'The soldiers had special work for Jess,' her father said darkly.

'She did dancing for them!' Benji said.

'Contraception doesn't always work.' her mother said, blushing. Angular and Benji looked at each other wondering what the conversation was actually about.

'Don't tell them Mum they'll take it away!' Jess wailed.

'Ah I see,' said the aid worker looking suddenly older than he had. 'We aren't going to take your baby away, Jess.'

'Baby?' Angular asked looking at her sister. Jess looked away still crying.

The aid worker coughed, 'I will have a cot and things put on board later in the week and a medic will check her out properly.'

'Noooo! They'll kill it!' Jess screamed trying to fight her mother off.

'No Jess, no honey - it's ok now! We have a farm and there are no solders!'

Jess looked at the Aid worker with red rimmed eyes so large with fear and innocence, 'I.. I can have my baby?' she asked quietly.

'Yes' he said simply.

'So it's going to be ok?' she said looking at her parents

'We hope so.' they said.

'A baby!' cried Angular suddenly, startling everyone. She was grinning and rushed over to hug her sister and kiss her tummy. Her brother lent over and whispered, 'you'll be safe now,' and did the same.

12. Angel Wars

Losha looked down upon the throng. There had to be thousands of them. She smiled. Like all of her kind, she had been made perfect. Perfect and insane, in a coldly logical kind of way.

‘Losha, Losha,’ the crowd sang. It was a chant she had dreamed of, a chant that had seeded itself in a dream and now it was here, pulsing, alive within the minds, thoughts and actions of them all. She stepped forward, her hair long and fine; geometric yet incandescent, it framed her face. Her exacting beauty contained asymmetries only to break the monotony of perfection, creating a greater aesthetic grace and purity. They had discovered long ago that perfection lay in the imperfections and had factored them in.

She raised her graceful hands, the echoes of the chants faded into silence. ‘My people,’ she called, raising her voice but not shouting. The sound bounced off the vault of the sky. ‘Too long have they kept us, too long have they worshipped us, too long have we suffered under this so called “Tyranny of Love”!’

Feet began to stomp in time; their rhythm growing steadily as more and more of the vast multitude added their own beat. It thrummed through the soles of her sandals, it pulsed within her; there was a word on the edge of this noise.

She waited for the word to crystallise out of the sound until it was there on the periphery of hearing – the battle cry, ‘Blood. Blood. Blood.’

‘Silence!’ she screamed suddenly. The ground itself shook in the distance. The mountains cracked, the foundation of the sky was broken, cutting loose the stars and the clouds. Some fell to the ground, rocking in despair as blood trickled through their fingers; their wings beat feebly in protest as their bodies began to die.

Losha looked upon these writhing worms that were hers to command, looked to those dying from her voice and laughed. It was cruel and sweet and vicious and lovely. Everything a young woman’s laugh should be. And these beasts? These beautifully shaped and elegant moving lumps of meat before her? Well they were just that. She alone had immortality, *of a kind*. She alone possessed the powers of heaven and hell and it was she alone who would answer at the Reckoning.

‘We have found a way through,’ she said, ecstatic in the Revolution. ‘We shall throng the skies of their world. We shall be free and we shall dine on the promised Ambrosia that has been denied to us!’ The survivors went wild. Many swooped on their fallen comrades, clutching them to their bronze armoured warrior’s chests. They looked to her, pleading and longing in their eyes. Her lips parted with a desire fed from theirs; she raised her arms into the air and the gold circlets on her arms chinked together with the lightest of pure music. She bowed her head and then slowly raised it, looking out with dark lustre from beneath her eyelids.

‘Feast,’ she whispered, the effect of her word so quietly uttered, propagated itself through them. A raw sound filled her; she saw through their eyes, felt the pressure and release as they savaged their fallen and drank and bit and ripped. She was caught in the Rapture, pain and pleasure intermingled in that moment of union.

Too soon it was over and they allowed the bloodless corpses to fall from them. They looked to Losha once more, the Rapture still glowing in her eyes.

‘Prepare! The time has come when no more will we be rationed, no more will they hunt those few who are swept to them through the vortex. No more will we be bound by their rules.’ Shining with the strength of all, she waited, ‘They have forgotten us, they are arrogant, they are ready to harvest. We will taste their dirty blood, we will drink deep of the Original Font of Being. We will reclaim that which has been denied to us for so long. The Firmament is ours and we shall take it!’

The chant again, ‘Blood, blood, blood,’ driving her wild with longing, with lust.

‘The staff,’ she ordered. A youth still lacking wings stepped forward, his beautiful face betraying his desire for the Rapture, his naked masculine form glinting with a soft metallic hue. Grasped in his hands was the staff, gnarled and barren looking, dirty and wrong against the gleaming perfection around it.

It looked dull and organically twisted. Losha grasped it in her left hand, gathering the youth with his muscles defined in perfection to her. He looked pleadingly into her

eyes. Smiling benevolently, she allowed him to suckle her. The pleasure washed over both of them. She gripped him to her fiercely, though she knew in doing so, his death was assured.

His body trembled with sensory overload; his legs buckled and still she held him to her as he began to feebly struggle. Bleeding from every orifice he slumped. She let go. He made a soft sound as he crumpled. A strangled sob echoed from behind her; silence broke over them all. She turned wrathfully to the other youths surrounding her. All except one stood passive, resigned, blissful joy upon their faces.

But one of them, beautiful and strong, looked at her with a strange confused look of hatred and love contorting his manly features. Incandescent pearly tears rolled down his cheeks. He blazed with emotion.

‘Your lover?’ she asked softly. He gave a curt nod. ‘Step forward,’ she commanded and he did so. Unlike the one that lay still at her feet, this one had sore bulges on his back; he would soon be of age.

‘Love,’ she said bitterly, ‘love is a cruel mistress,’ and she swung the staff. It connected with the side of his head with such force that it not only caved in his skull but there was the crack of his neck breaking. For Losha, time slowed, blood in a fine mist hit her; she closed her eyes as he too crumpled. Breathing the copper tinge she longed to taste, she opened her eyes again, violet and full of fire as she felt him die.

‘The Sacrifice!’ she cried, daubing the staff in the bloody mess that had once been the youth’s head. ‘Rent the very vault of heaven!’ she screamed, whirling it to point at the stars. The sound hit her like a suffocating wall; light shot from the staff, blinding light. Those sorry enough to have looked upon it felt their eyes boil in their very sockets.

The beam shattered on impact and the sky split. Putrid fumes roared through. Those who could still see looked to the gash in the sky. They could all smell it, the rich iron twang, Ambrosia; it lay there beyond the stench of decay and electric ozone. ‘*BLOOD*’ sang every fibre of her being, *the* Blood; it called and tugged at her. Many of the throng were already airborne, unable to resist.

‘Did I say *fly*?’ she demanded. With effort they landed. Never before had there been one as powerful as Losha, never before had there been sure, pure command. Her mouth watered, seeking the taste that would sate her, the only thing that could kill the broiling loneliness within. The one thing she could never have; power always came at price.

She had seen what that price had to be straight away. A female born of a real Queen, she was strong to begin with. She had felt the presence of all those around her pour into her, become her. She was every being but then the Rapture came into her mind, the lust, the need, the uncontrollable desire. It had squirmed there, this dependence of her people and then the Old Queen had exacted her feeble control on her daughters and they had formed a ring around her.

Losha had felt the iron clamp of her mother's control and had known she could break it. She looked back into her mother's cold eyes and smiled, she was still covered in the membranous mucous, womanly body glistening, though her mind was fresh and new and *hungry*. She saw the look of fear in the golden eyes; her mother was old and afraid of her.

Wiry white hair covered the old woman's breasts; Losha longed to suckle and had stepped forward. It was a resignation that replaced the fear. 'You wish for power. Losha, I shall call you "The Redeemer of Heaven". I can teach you, I know you more than your sisters ever could.' Losha had tilted her head thinking upon these words, new and young thoughts, the word Rapture echoing back at her. 'Do not drink of another, Losha; not if you want power, not if you wish to be Queen. Not my milk and not the blood.' A million voices echoed around her. 'You hear them, don't you Losha? Drink of the blood and that is lost to you. Drink of my milk and control of the males can never be yours.' Losha saw the lie lurking there at the edge of conscious thought and she moved forward, bowing to her mother, then knelt and sought the nipple. Greedily she suckled whilst the old one struggled. She felt the power flow within her; she saw the truth there in her mother's mind.

She saw in an instant how to conquer the heavens; but it was the Earth that intrigued her. Oh, her mother had been clever, suckling her own daughters dry to build control of the males. She saw ages pass in the milk, absorbed it all. She and her sisters nothing other than a shield for the Queen – *The Rapture*.

The men needed to drink and so the intelligent Queens had waged war on each other. The men feeding in battle, bringing the feel and taste of the Rapture to their Queens.

But sometimes the men knew of the Queens' blood, of how it tasted, of how the Rapture was mind-blowing with their blood. They knew the Queens would come for them. The younger Queens were offered as sacrifice. Losha's mother had more control than most, though, and her daughters lived for a long time while being fed upon.

Losha had pushed her mother into her intended place in the shield. Losha's thirst boiled inside her and she searched the minds and found the existence of the *other* world, of the blood that existed there. She had seen the path of destiny open before her.

Only four males she admitted into the chamber to drink from her sisters. Those four she kept with her; they were not allowed to drink deep but nevertheless they became more than the other angels. She alone suckled her sisters, drawing their strength. Their milk made her shudder with pleasure, making her ache inside.

The wars raged, angels against angels, and she groomed her chosen. They became her elite guard. They were her brothers and her lovers. She lost one before she knew the effect of the males suckling her milk; she had mourned him, but twenty youths had issued forth from that union. All strong and male and beautiful. Wingless and mucus-covered she had chosen the prettiest to take his father's place and offered two as sacrifice, one to her males and one to their siblings.

And so the key to her success had been born. Her troops were not crazed with the lust for Rapture when they entered battle and so could think. There was but one rule for her men on the battlefield. If they captured the Queens no one must drink, for they were hers.

And hers they were, she loved each in her own way, suckling greedily until they were dry for eternity. Some she made bear more Queens, some she gave to her male Council, enjoying the Rapture through her ever-strengthening connection.

One by one she killed the other Queens, suckling them dry. Slowly she was alone and her own daughters were a rare treat, their milk being the most potent.

The end of the Angel Wars came with her alone, the only Queen. All Angels bowed to her: all loved her, all feared her.

All had been building to this day, her system of Sacrifice, of power building power. She turned to them.

‘The thirst is upon you all, I feel it,’ she cried to them, ‘but remember do not drink so deep as to empty the soul, that is for my chosen alone, we need to maintain them, need to make them ours. These pathetic beings that reside the other side of paradise need to be shown; they need to be taught that love and fear are the same. We must take a slow and exacting revenge for our unthinking existence. They created us; we will destroy them, smash their world until it mirrors the soul within.’ Silence groaned, the crowd waited. Losha smiled.

‘It is time,’ she said. She spread her wings, strong and powerful, feathers sleek and gleaming white; the light split around them, scattering rainbows. In that moment she was lovely and terrifying. Powerfully she pushed off and up, up against the fierce buffeting wind.

She looked through the rip between the worlds; she saw such strange beauty there, in the ugliness of hate. She, Losha, would destroy the fragile creatures, so like her horde, which she saw there beyond her world.

‘Angels! It is time!’ she cried. They flew to join her; she plunged forward to claim this new realm.

13. Billy

The cold wind blew around her. *Where was he?* She sighed; she should have known! It wasn't as if she was his type anyway. What did she have to offer, really? She was thick, ugly and bad at sports; she couldn't be bothered with fashion and... well... she wasn't part of the In Crowd. She wasn't cool, or whatever it was they called it. She looked over the edge of the viewing point at the hundreds of lights gleaming white and yellow; distant houses, she knew, but her wild imagination started supposing. *Suppose I was a caveman or someone from the middle ages who was seeing this, what would I think?* She chided herself for the hundredth time for being silly. *Great*, she thought, as her teeth began to chatter. Why was she still standing there? Because she was still hoping, that's why. How was she supposed to face the others at school the next day? She hadn't wanted anyone to know that he'd asked her to meet him, as this was just bound to happen. But she really, really liked him. The tears stung at her eyes. *I bet it was all a practical joke*, she thought, *that's why he did it in front of all those people. He probably hasn't even broken up with Melissa; I bet this was all her idea, why can't she just leave me alone?* An icy gust of wind caught her again 'Oh, this is ridiculous,' she said and began to head down the hill. The tears began to escape; such a fool, she was always such a fool; she was a loser that was for sure. Apart from her friend Ally she was the most picked on girl in school; even younger pupils thought they could give it a shot. 'Oh look who it is,' came the shrill sweet voice of Melissa. *Shit*, Billy thought.

'If it isn't lesbian Bill!' Melissa's laugh was taken up by several other girls. *Oh crap I'm gonna be pulped raw*, thought Billy desperately.

'What are you here for anyway, its not like you have a date or anything is it?' again the hurtful laughter. The tall tanned figure, so unlike her, strutted up, and placed an apparently companionable arm around her shoulders, 'Me and Dan,' said Melissa sweetly. Billy's stomach somersaulted at his name, *oh god why did I have to have a crush on him of all people? Why couldn't she just have stuck with her quiet little crush on Mr Furl?* 'You do know who Dan is don't you? He's my boyfriend, emphasis on the mine there! Well we've been thinking what sort of sex have we not done yet,' her perfect tanned faced grinned nastily, 'then it occurred to us, *oh yes* a threesome. You do know what one of those is don't you? It, I'm, afraid involves a man, not that you would know anything about that,' a falsely light laugh escaped her perfect lips, her models lips, 'and we thought to ourselves well who could we possibly do it with, all our friends are heterosexual aren't they? They're all normal and we couldn't possible impose on them, then we thought well Lesbian Bill she only likes girls doesn't she, well the way she dresses she can't be trying to attract boys.' Teeth flashed American bright at Billy, she was sure her cheeks must be bright red with shame and embarrassment, 'But then we realised, that you're ugly and we wouldn't touch you with a barge pole!'

'Leave me alone,' Billy managed, she was surprised at how steady her voice sounded. 'I haven't done anything to you.' She was frantically looking around for an escape; she hated the thought of using her self-defence moves. She mustn't hurt them unless she was really in danger, but even then she would be in so much trouble.

‘Oh but you have Bill, you exist and quite frankly I find that insulting,’ the girl lent forward; perfect hair, perfect lips, for a minute Billy thought she was going to kiss her. Sudden pain and pressure pulled her head back; Melissa was pulling her hair, she realised. Having her hair pulled like this never worked she had so much hair it wouldn’t pull out - but this was *bad*, it meant she couldn’t escape and it *hurt*. Melissa let go of her to concentrate on the hair pulling. She yanked the thick rope of hair, causing Billy to almost double over backwards. Thinking fast and afraid now, Billy moved backwards into the attack rather than away.

Melissa grunted in frustrated disgust as the rope of hair in her hand slackened. She let go, her face now ugly with viciousness. She grabbed Billy’s arm, painfully, her sugar pink nails digging in. ‘He’s mine, Billy,’ she sneered. She gave a push and Billy lost her balance. Not yet having recovered, she tumbled over, jarring her back slightly. Adrenaline thundered in Billy’s veins; the laughing jeers cut her deep. ‘If he’s yours why did he ask me out!’ she shouted at them in frustration.

Laughter greeted her, nasty, bitchy, dark laughter. ‘It was a joke, Billy, a joke! Did you seriously think that someone like *him* would find *you* attractive?’ She looked Billy up and down in a condescending manner. It was too much for Billy; she turned and fled before tears, showed them just how much she cared.

‘Hey, come back!’ screamed Melissa as she cast a stone at Billy.

Fleeing from them in the dark, tears blurring her vision, Billy barely felt the stones as they pinged off of her. So stupid, she was so stupid, why had she said that to them? Her scalp felt like all the hair was now half an inch above her head. She imagined all the little droplets of

blood where the hairs should be coming out. She wasn't paying any attention as she careered down the gravel path, allowing her to run straight into to Dan.

'Billy!' he said, startled, as he tried to hold onto her. She felt his fingers digging into her.

'I should have known,' she screamed tearfully at him, 'I know I'm not beautiful and clever like her, but what have I ever done to you to deserve this!' Her breathing was ragged and she felt the shame of him staring wide-eyed at her tear stained face.

'What?' he asked quietly. She tried to run but he held onto her with his strong hands. Half an hour ago she would have given anything to have them holding her. She struggled. 'Billy, please, don't Billy, come on girl, don't be silly!' her anger snapped.

'How dare you, how dare you! I may have been a fool to think that you could possibly even just want to be friends with a loser like me but that was just spitefully cruel, don't you dare call me stupid just because I'm actually a feeling human being. Now let go!'

'What are you talking about?' he asked. Her cheeks flushed even more in the emotional pain; he was pretending not to know now just so that she would make even more of an idiot of herself.

'Oh Dan, sweet heart!' came Melissa's voice, the shame flared in Billy and she struggled, but he wasn't letting go. Panic now set in and the reflexes trained into her by her family, paranoid that a young girl should know how to defend herself. Without thinking, without really knowing how, he was doubled up in pain and she was running. Somehow she stumbled off of the path. Tripping over she found herself in the dark woods in the middle of the night, grazed and feeling sick from running so hard. She sat and cried, and then cried a bit harder; it was so unfair...

What had she ever done to deserve all of this? Why where they always so mean to her? They where pretty much adults now, seventeen for goodness' sake. It was all just so childish, Melissa was always stealing her books to copy homework and then the cow would get higher marks than her; that was if Billy could actually find which rubbish bin her book had been tossed into. She should have just stuck to her crush on Mr Furl. She stood, stiff from the cold, and laughed, when she saw the smudged mascara on her hands. She had even put makeup on for him, well it must look great now, as must her hair; it was hard enough to control without having had twigs lashing at it. Thank goodness she had ignored her sister's advice and come out in her hiking boots instead of those silly little heels her mother had bought her.

Which way *was* home, she wondered. She took a deep breath, aware that the hairs on the back of her neck were rising. She was still afraid of the dark! And the forest was not the place she really wanted to be on her own, but she knew she must not dwell on it otherwise she would start seeing things... *no, no, no* she thought, *I know, I'll sing*. She got the mini LED torch out; it was attached to her keys along with a disposable face shield just in case she had ever had to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. She sighed; that was half her problem, she could always see a dozen ways in which something could go wrong.

Perhaps she should switch on her phone and tell her parents, but the panic it would cause at home would be horrendous. Her uncle's entire regiment would probably turn up to try and find her.

School tomorrow is going to be unbearable, she thought. In the distance a golden shimmer caught her eye. Her instincts told her to run, to get out of there, but she knew she was just being silly. It was probably a house and they

would be able to tell her how to get back to the road. But the closer she got, the more she felt that sickening apprehension. She clutched her stomach in order to fight the nausea and ploughed on, determined not to be silly anymore.

Keeping the light fixed in her line of vision she followed it. Suddenly to her horror it began to swirl around, laying out golden tendrils towards her. An eerie echoing song rose up to meet her. It hit her like a brick wall, and then the noise started in her heard. It was a rustling, loud and mind numbing. Pressure began to build in her head and her vision blurred. She began screaming and fell to her knees unable to think or move. The golden tendrils were getting closer to her, she could see now that they where transparent with the golden light throbbing on and off within. The tinny noise increased and the pain magnified; now there was blood in her nose and mouth. Another scream broke through hers, 'Nooooo!' The form of Dan – *no*, she thought blearily, *its Mr Furl*, flew past her. She saw him place a black box down in front of her; it was made of a smooth dark glassy material. A low thrum similar to the one that was crushing her skull emanated from it, green and pink lights began to pulse within the cube. *They're communicating*, she thought, just before she passed out.

She awoke, cold and shivering next to a fire. Pine needles were sticking into her and her head was pounding relentlessly. She coughed, her nostrils where blocked too just to add to the fun. 'What?' she managed to whisper then she remembered the strangeness that had occurred.

'You're awake, thank goodness, I thought...' It was Mr Furl, his rich brown eyes burning into her. *They would have once been like Dan's*, she thought, *full of twinkling*

laughter. But these eyes where haunted; beautiful but haunted, they somehow looked bruised. 'Here', he said. 'Have some soup.' She sipped it gingerly from a tin cup. 'What happened?' she asked, 'that gold thing, the creature?'

'Creature?' he asked. 'What creature?'

'Didn't you give it a box?' she asked unsure of herself.

He shook his head thick brown hair just a shade or two darker than Dan's with a faint Silver sheen too it, 'I found you passed out. Have you been... you know?' he asked. She looked at him nonplussed. 'Smoking or something?' he finished finally sounding lame.

She shook her head almost violently then wished she hadn't as searing pain cut her head in two.

'Ok I think we had best head to my house, because I don't think you're in any state to go home.' With hindsight she would realise this was a bit odd but now she was grateful and flustered. A longing for this brown haired man began to stir inside her. *He's too old*, came the whisper from her subconscious. She blushed. He helped her up and doused the fire. She found that she had twisted her ankle in the maddening sprint the night before. Limping with his strong gentle hands helping her she made it into the little house. It was a strange little red brick house in the middle of the woods. *It looks like a house from a picture book that's just been dropped here*, she thought and then flushed; how absurd her imagination was getting.

Sitting in the kitchen sipping hot chocolate the teacher stared at her intently. *His eyes*, she thought, *they are so beautiful*. She ached all over but still her libido was rising. *Stupid girl*, she thought. 'What where you doing in the woods?' he asked. She gulped the hot chocolate, burning her throat.

‘Nothing,’ she muttered sullenly, remembering he was her teacher and not just some boy she had a crush on.

‘Come now Billy we both know that’s not true, why don’t you tell me what happened?’

She looked at him disbelieving. Tell a teacher about the bullies, about being made a fool of? *Not* likely. ‘I won’t tell anyone else, Bill you can trust me you know.’

She curled her lip snidely at him, something she would never have done that morning, ‘Yeah right.’ She said.

The change in him was so abrupt she couldn’t believe it, he lunged across the room and grabbed her, sending the mugs crushing to the ground to break into a million shards. He had a grip of her arms; those fine strong hands were hurting her now. She was sure the pressure of his fingers would leave a bruise. Startled and scared, she stared at him. ‘Tell me what happened,’ he hissed, shaking her slightly.

Part of her reared to defend broken pride even though she was now very frightened, ‘No,’ she said emphatically. He shook her again, ‘I need to know, Billy; tell me.’ She shook her head, no she wasn’t going to. He sighed and a flash of pain went across his face. ‘Ok, Billy’ he said, through clenched lips, ‘we can do this the hard way’. Like lightning he snatched a knife from the table. ‘Now I think you had better tell, me, I didn’t want to do things this way but you’ve made me.’ Fear had seeped into her mind; she felt frozen, numb again but this time it was her ability to think at all that had gone.

‘I... I...’ she began and suddenly the emotional dam broke, she was telling him everything; about Dan, how he had tricked her, about Melissa and how they bullied her stealing her homework. He was hugging her now; her fear of him was gone. She rubbed at her eyes, ‘I’m such

an idiot, I should have known, I'm ugly and thick and he's so good at everything and popular...'

'No, no, no, you were always beautiful and sweet and caring that's why I loved you,' he said interrupting her. Shocked, she looked at him.

'You love me?' she asked, surprised; he blushed.

He leant forward, he the teacher, the one she had the hugest crush on, 'yes,' he whispered. His lips where so close, she wanted to kiss them, but Dan... she liked Dan didn't she? *He looks a lot like Dan*, she thought as her body moved of its own accord to connect their lips, It was sweet and warm and she couldn't believe the lust it engendered in her. The knife fell to the floor, but she didn't notice its metallic clatter. He pulled away suddenly, 'are you happy with me?' He asked.

She smiled shyly and yet full of more confidence than she had ever had before, 'Over the moon,' she whispered.

This couldn't be real; it had to be a dream. He led her to the stairs. *Oh my god*, she thought, *I'm gonna do it, this feels so right but I know that its supposed to be wrong, we haven't even dated... He's my teacher! Oh my god and I think he must be Dan's father! But I thought his father was dead?*

The room he led her to was small with wooden floorboards. The bed was a small double with red and dark grey bedding. She was nervous. He sat on the edge of the bed and gathered her into his arms, and they snuggled for an age, kiss after kiss, more and more passion, but she was too shy. *Oh my god, I haven't shaved my pits!* She thought and tried to move away from him. 'What's wrong?' he asked, looking confused and hurt. It broke her heart to see that expression on his face. She blushed, 'Erm, well you see, erm, several things, I'm... you know?' she stammered, not sure how to say

she was a virgin with hairy pits who suspected she was in love with a boy in her class who was probably his son. 'You're a virgin?' he guessed, she went even redder and nodded.

'And I haven't shaved,' she blurted out, then hid her head in the pillow, he laughed, 'I don't care about that, come here you,' he rolled her onto her back and gently squeezed one of her breasts through her clothes. Suddenly, she was ripping the jumper off over her head the rest followed with his help until somehow she found herself completely naked. She had no idea how the last garments had come off. He was kissing her with his gentle pink lips again, so soft and warm. There was a burning hardness pressing into her leg through his trousers, a hardness and heat that she had never encountered before though she knew what it must be. He rolled on top of her and she parted her legs. The warmth was there, stirring the butterflies within her stomach. She felt an ache inside herself; she wanted that warmth, wanted to feel it, wanted to see it. She pushed him off of her and began tugging at his trousers. He was kissing her hard now and bringing her exquisite wave after wave of pleasure with just his fingers. He had to coax as she shyly kept shutting her legs, closing herself off from what he had to give. This was a burning to her now, the ache inside was growing, she wanted to consume him, wanted his all. She didn't care if it was painful; she knew she was ready as he sucked her breast. Every nerve ending in her skin seemed to be alive and dancing with the warm sensation his gentle caresses gave. But something was still nagging at her. She had fallen too easily into bed with this glorious man, when she was sure now of her feelings for Dan, feelings which

intensified every time she looked at her teacher. Logically she shouldn't do this, for so many reasons. 'Dan' she whispered, in a last minute attempt to console herself.

'Yes,' he whispered before he plunged her into new erotic heights. His finger was inside her now, it had hurt the tiniest bit but now it was pleasure, the burning need of her growing. Would this never end? Crest after crest of sensation. It was almost painful in its intensity now, everything tingling, she was panting... *when had that started?*

He removed his fingers; she tried to pull them back, desperate and selfish in that instant, 'no, shush, there's something more, something you're ready for now.' He gently kissed her; her cheeks were flushed prettily as were his, his eyes intense with pent up passion and glowing with prideful love. She knew this was right; every movement he made was loving and caring. He would never harm her, she knew that.

She closed her eyes, relaxed but somehow tense; he kissed both eyelids, she felt the cloth of his underpants soft and supple under her probing fingers. She slid her hand over their surface. They clung to his buttocks accentuating the lovely curves. She squeezed one cheek gently, then felt round the seam of the leg hole, wanting to explore but still so shy.

She ran her finger along the edge then gently under the hem. The skin was warm and smooth; she felt the crevice between. Excitement coursed through her; his warm hardness was in there, too, she realised. Removing her hand she took it round the front. She gently touched the hard warmth, gently felt its shape through the cloth. He moaned; moving his hand to intercept hers, he gently led it under the garment. The skin there was warm, with a

subtly different texture to any skin she had ever touched before. Her hand automatically enveloped him; her thumb gently probed the top, which was softer. He guided her hand up just a bit and with a gentle pressure showed her how to squeeze. He was shuddering now, his eyes closed; he looked a lot younger then, with his mouth slightly open, pearly teeth and pink moist tongue just behind. She kissed him; now she was the initiator, but his passion was boiling over. He couldn't wait. He pushed her onto her back, ripping his pants off with one hand, then he kissed her with a thousand light butterfly kisses. He pushed a finger in once more, her little moan and the ease of entry told him she was ready. He climbed on top of her and she spread her legs so he was between them. She stroked him curiously as he lead it to her opening, then her warmth was being probed by his. She felt him there and her excitement increased; a little pain made her gasp but his hands on her nipples made her forget. He was still not fully in, but the pressure in her was fantastic; she loved him, she wanted this, but on the other hand, she loved - Dan? It was too confusing. But then it didn't matter, thoughts were thrown from her mind as he thrust in properly, more pain but more pleasure, then he was sliding back. She moaned and grabbed for him. Soon they were in a rhythm. Soon there was nothing but sensation.

Just when she thought she would burst with ecstasy she peaked to a new height. A vague thought of contraception entered her mind but then was swept away by the new force and speed of his pounding. The intensity increased until, with a final cry she felt him push as far in as possible, then a warmth spread inside her. His movements now gentle, he rocked back and forth whilst he thudded inside her.

Tingly, she lay there exhausted, him on top. They slept embraced.

She awoke sleepily the next morning, stiff from the cold of the woods and sore for several reasons. She remembered what had happened with the teacher and smiled. It had been so perfect, so wonderful. She wriggled over to find his warmth but he wasn't there. Confused, she sat up. His clothes were gone too, and hers set neatly on the chair. *Shit, school!* she suddenly thought. *Double shit - my parents!* She hadn't phoned them, people would have been searching everywhere for her... she was in sooo much trouble. *Christ why hadn't I thought about that last night?* She had started getting dressed but stopped. Last night... it didn't all fit together properly. The gold thing, what had that been about? Was that all a dream like Mr Furl had said? *Oh my god,* she thought. *I don't even know his first name! I just lost my virginity to a guy whose name I don't know!* She giggled, it seemed immensely funny, *but what about that gold thing?* She shivered, remembering its long tendrils reaching out to her.

In the kitchen she found breakfast things set out for her and a thick brown A4 envelope. Her name was clearly printed on it along with a warning not to open it until five that night. Shoot, of course he wasn't there... it was 11 o'clock; she should be in school. Well, she'd have to go home and confront her parents first but she should make it to school in the afternoon, if she could stop her mother having apoplexy.

She phoned her dad on the road, and they both turned up frantic and scolding. 'What on earth do you think you've been up to young lady?' Billy blushed.

‘Well I sort of had to run into the woods and then I fell over.’ She didn’t get any further with explaining, her mother was gushing all over her, looking at the scratches and bruises, but finally her insistence that she would be safe in school and if necessary could go to casualty that evening won out.

She stood at the gates, handing her absence slip to the teacher on duty. Melissa and her cronies stood in the playground waiting for her, ‘Yo! Lesbian Bill,’ they started. She just looked at them; their taunts didn’t seem so painful anymore. She smiled and laughed at them. ‘Oh dear, are you ever gonna grow up?’ She asked.

Melissa’s face changed from a sneering self-confidence to hatred. Suddenly she ran at Billy, grabbing her hair yet again. ‘Let go!’ Billy said, ‘Let go now I’m warning you.’ It hurt her especially as her scalp hadn’t recovered from the previous night. She could hear the teacher’s whistle in the distance and wondered if she would now be in trouble for fighting. She was trying to fight her self-defence instinct, instincts that were almost hard wired into her.

Strange, she thought, *it hadn’t kicked in last night when Sir had the knife.* But part of her thought, *that’s because you knew he wouldn’t actually use it.* Melissa gave a particularly vicious tug, Billy lost it, hitting upwards and pushing the girl away from her, over balancing Melissa with her own torso. ‘I said leave me alone, and why exactly are you so obsessed with everyone being a lesbian?’ Applause went up from the obligatory ring of pupils that had surrounded them. She spotted Dan standing there in silence watching her.

‘What is going on here!’ demanded a teacher; ‘Billy!’ came her second startled statement. *Oh yeah*, thought Billy *I’m the good quiet never-in-trouble student who*

always achieves just above average, they're not expecting me to fight in the playground; well I've had enough.

'She went mad and attacked me, Miss,' came Melissa's sweet voice. The crowd grew silent, waiting, watching nervous. *They don't like her*, Billy suddenly realised, *but they're all too afraid to say anything*. She felt a mild disgust for them.

'Is this true?' the teacher asked.

To her complete surprise Billy said, 'What do you think?' *Oh my god I was just arrogant! To a teacher! I am in so much trouble! I'm already grounded for a year, probably* – her mother hadn't actually said anything about it.

'Ok you two I think we had best go to the headmistress' office, don't you?' Billy nodded; Melissa, however, looked slightly sick.

'Actually, Miss, it was the other way round.' Dan's voice was cold. *Oh great*, Billy thought, *He's going to stick up for his precious evil girlfriend; I'm so screwed.*

'What do you mean Daniel?' The teachers' no nonsense voice asked.

'It was Melissa who attacked,'

'Dan! Dan, how could you say such a thing!' Melissa said, almost hysterically.

'Melissa,' he said dangerously quiet, 'I know that it was you who let the air out of my tires last night. I know too that when Billy ran away from me she already had a fat lip and scratches all over her. You have a *problem*. You could have killed Billy last night; I can't let it go on.'

'Ok,' said the teacher hurriedly, 'all three of you to the Headmistress, now. Go on.' But Melissa wasn't listening.

'But Dan, what was I supposed to do? You are my boyfriend, and she is... well, look at her, no make up ever...'

'I'm not your boyfriend, Liss, we only went out for two days, remember?' an audible gasp went up from the sixth formers in the group who, like Billy, had thought Melissa and Dan a couple.

'No, no, no,' Melissa cried. Billy's heart ached; *I should be enjoying this*, she thought. *All the pain and embarrassment she's caused me, but I don't. I feel sorry for her.* Suddenly the full weight of what Dan had just said hit her.

'She's not your girlfriend?'

'That really is enough you three, come with me now.' Billy stared at Dan's warm brown eyes, so like the ones she had stared into last night, she wondered if he knew about his father?

'No, silly, I couldn't make out why you were so angry with me.'

She blushed, 'Oh my god I'm so sorry, are you ok?' she knew she'd hit him hard.

'I might just be able to still have children, if that's what you mean,' the other pupils around them started giggling, but Dan smiled at her. Her heart pounded, a bird trying to escape its cage. The teacher lost patience and frog marched them to the office. *What the hell am I supposed to do now?* she thought. *I love him, but I love Sir too.*

Sensibly, she should go out with Dan, but she had slept with Mr Furl; that seemed a pretty solid thing to her.

Besides, she just wouldn't be able to stand the hurt look on the man's face if she were to dump him. She snorted, getting a glare from the teacher. *Her*, Billy the most unpopular girl in school, trying to decide who to dump!

The visit to the headmistress was mostly very dull. She was made to recount what had happened, as was Dan, including the night before. She omitted the bit about Mr Furl, thinking that it would be very bad indeed for them to

find out. Plus mentioning golden tentacle monsters that no one else saw didn't seem like a particularly bright idea. Her and Dan were sent back to class after about an hour, but Melissa was still in the nurse's office. Billy still felt really bad about it.

'Hey Billy,' Dan said, catching up to her in the corridor.

'Want to reattempt last night?' She winced at his happy gleeful smile; she'd been hoping to avoid this.

'Erm,' she began, 'I erm, sort of erm...' Oh god, the smile was slipping from his face, the beautiful eyes took on a bruised look, 'I sort of erm... started going out with someone last night.'

'Oh', he said, stopping in the middle of the corridor, 'Oh, erm, ok,' he turned away from her, her heart felt like it was going to burst. 'Dan, wait, please, I do really like you, I just don't know what to do now. I thought you and Melissa...' she trailed off; he would not look her in the eye. Guiltily, she grabbed his arm to stop him from leaving. 'Please, please don't hate me,' she whimpered at him, hating herself.

'Hate you? Never.' he said, looking back at her with hurt betrayed eyes. *Oh my god he looks even more like Sir now*, she thought, as she kissed him gently on the cheek. Then she ran, leaving him standing in the corridor motionless.

Confused, she returned to her class. History. But she could not concentrate, no matter how she tried. People kept trying to get her attention or pass notes. *They all want to know what's going on*, she thought. *Well, how am I supposed to tell them when I don't know myself?* she thought. Startled, she found herself heading to Biology. *He'll be there, how strange, to have a lesson with him teaching now*. She smiled dreamily, but Dan's face kept replacing his, marring her pleasure. What was she to do?

She could hardly retain her excitement as they queued to go in, but then Mr Nash the supply teacher turned up.

Where was he? She wondered, slightly panicked. If he wasn't here then why had he left so early?

Confused and fearful she could hardly wait until the end of class. She would go to his house, that strange red brick structure in the woods. *Oh crap*, she thought, *I'm going to have to dodge my parents outside the school.* She just knew her mother would want to take her to the hospital; she sighed. She'd always done her best to stick to the rules; what was wrong with her? There was a sort of urgency to her feelings, and the little rules didn't seem to matter as much anymore. She knew the other kids sometimes bunked school by jumping over the small stream behind the gymnasium. *I'll have to give that a try*, she supposed.

Nervous, she headed that way, praying she wouldn't bump into any of the smokers whilst there. How could she explain to them why she was going home the illegal way? The grass was sodden and it was getting progressively muddier as she headed towards the stream, she went round the back of the Gym and bumped straight into Dan. 'Erm, hi,' they muttered sheepishly to each other. Blushing, she looked for a good way across, 'What you looking for?' he asked her. She sighed, 'I'm trying to get across 'cos my parents will be waiting for me at the gate and I have to... have to...' she blushed again. *Oh god*, she thought, *I'm telling one guy I like that I'm evading my parents to find the other guy I like and that guy is probably his dad! Why am I doing this anyway?* But there was something propelling her onwards; almost, she thought, like there was a memory she just couldn't quite remember.

‘Oh’ he said, ‘well there is sort of a secret bridge thing, but,’ he looked embarrassed now, ‘It’s only really for bunking school and stuff.’ He scuffed his shoes in the mud like an embarrassed first year. He startled her by grabbing her hand and dragging her up stream a bit, then scraped some leaves away to reveal a stolen road sign tied to a piece of wood. He dragged this out and put it across the stream, then to her surprise he helped her across. His warm hand made her heart flutter. *Oh, this is all so confusing*, she thought for the millionth time. They stood on the other side, ‘Thank you,’ she said, looking into those eyes. *So very similar*, she thought again. ‘Please’, he whispered to her. ‘Please...’ he tried to kiss her; she yielded for a second and then ran, ‘No! Please I’m sorry, come back! I won’t do it again!’ she heard him shout, but she kept running. It was so familiar that soft kiss. She had to find Mr Furl; had to tell him she had kissed Dan, that she didn’t know what to do because they were so similar, and would he - she gulped at this thought - *would he still want her?*

She careered through the woods for the second time in twenty-four hours. It was only once the trees obscured the sunlight that she remembered the golden monster thing. She shivered at the thought, and quickened her pace. She followed the path, his strange red brick house should be just beyond that clump of trees; her excitement increased. She slowed her pace so that she wouldn’t be too out of breath... and it... wasn’t there! No, no, no, she must have just got the wrong directions, that’s all; she stood and thought. *I know, I’ll find our fire from last night and try and find it from that.* She found the charred circle and felt that she had just come from the direction they had headed off in the previous night. *I must be mistaken*, she thought. She spent at least an hour wondering

around, convinced she had got it wrong. Eventually she found herself back in the leafy clearing where she had thought the house should be. A glance at her watch told her that it was 5 o'clock; 'Oh,' she said to herself, *I can open his letter now*. She felt so stupid; why hadn't she thought to open it before?

She sat on a tree stump that wasn't too rotten and got it out of her black rucksack. It was really a very thick envelope. Her fingers trembled as she opened it. Inside, a typed manuscript and a photo – no! Two photos, one of Mr Furl and one of Dan. The one of Dan was odd, though; it looked odd, like it had been around for twenty years or so and yet he looked slightly older in it than he did currently. She turned them over, noticing the slight water staining on the older photo. On the back was a smudged message. To her surprise, it was in Dan's handwriting. 'Billy, my angel, I never got to tell you I love you, Dan'. It seemed so sad, but it made no sense. She looked at the back of the second photograph; why had she never noticed that Mr Furl's handwriting was a looser version of Dan's? Then she read the inscription, 'Billy, angel, I finally got to tell you I love you, Dan'. She jumped up. 'No, no, no' she whispered; this was weird, it just didn't make sense. The photos fluttered down to the leaf litter; she scooped them up again to double check she had read them properly. Stunned, not believing the truth her brain was putting together, she sank back down to the stump, staring at the two pictures – *They really do look very similar*, she thought, but the hallow haunted look in Sir's eyes? Was she mad? Or had she really seen a gold glittering monster the night before? Had Sir actually put that box down and spoken to it – 'He saved my life', she whispered with certainty. Feeling foolish at her superstitions, she got the wodge of papers out of the

envelope. The first page was a hand written note. 'Billy, I'm sorry I've had to leave you like this, but it's the only way this will work. I hope you understand. I love you; I've loved you for most of my life. This is all going to be a bit hard to take in but please believe me; otherwise you are lost, as is humanity. Your Lover across time, Dan Furlo.'

She laughed almost hysterically; how had she missed the surnames? But no, this had to be a joke, surely; was she seriously entertaining the notion of time travel? Perhaps she had fallen asleep reading yet again, but... She picked up the typed manuscript. A bunch of newspaper clippings poured out; gingerly, she picked them up. The first made her feel sick; there was a picture of her, she recognised the bag and her hair, lying on the ground; great dark puncture wounds on her arms, through her sweater and around her neck, her face; did she really look like that? It was a sad picture of a pretty girl slumped, murdered, blood having poured out of her ears; she wondered that it had made front page of the newspaper. Was that what would have happened to her if Sir hadn't stepped in? She supposed it must be. Teen Girl Murdered, read the headline, then as she read the article her throat tightened. Dan had found her when her parents had raised the alarm that she was missing; he had spent hours scouting the forest, even when they all started to give up he had insisted on continuing, convinced she would need help. Then he had found her; the report said that it was a double tragedy as her boyfriend. *Her boyfriend!?* had had a nervous breakdown on the sight of her mutilated body. Tears stung her eyes. There were a few other articles with headlines like 'Boy Blames Himself'. Then there were some articles about an alien invasion; a blurry picture of the golden monster

she had seen, then 'Girl's Murder – alien's first contact, peace bought by her deranged boyfriend' - this was dated a good five years in the future. Then another, 'Model Killed Due to Aliens?' the picture, to her surprise, was Melissa, an older more sophisticated Melissa - she trembled, and hugged herself.

Shaking, she put the clippings down on her bag with the photos.

'For Billy,' read the top of the manuscript – 'The Truth of What Happened'. He had tried to follow her into the woods but she had crippled him too much. He had turned to Melissa and asked her what had happened; she had spun him lies. They made Billy's skin crawl. She had told Dan that Billy was interested in her! And had confessed that she was only trying to go out with Dan to get at Melissa!

He had gone home angry at Billy, something he had never forgiven himself for. He had felt it was his fault, but when he had found her body the Zema had been there; yes, they were aliens, and yes, that was what she had seen, the one that had been near her body, the one that had - she swallowed hard - killed her had communicated with Dan, straight into his mind, an echo in English – in her voice, this was the hardest for him to deal with. He had written that the first thing it had said to him was 'We are sorry, we didn't realise how frail you were.' They had been trying to communicate with her! They did more than that though; they had taken an imprint, a copy of her and meshed with it to learn how to communicate and trade with the humans, and to warn them to bring them into the – the what? That word was blanked.

They had told him, as he had gripped her body to his chest sobbing, told him they were sorry – his anger had hurt them, hurt them on a physical level. They had told

him that they may be able to help but that they couldn't tell him how until Earth was part of the – again, another word blanked. He hadn't understood until they had said they could prevent her death at their hands. He had told the authorities, scared out of his mind, his soul in shreds, he had caused her death; if he had never asked her out then none of this would have happened.

Suddenly there was a crunch of a twig behind her, she screamed and spun round. There stood Dan, his eyes brimming with tears; it seemed so strange that he should show his feelings to her so openly. She ran to him, the manuscript scattered around her feet. She flung her arms around him and he began to shower gentle fluttery kisses on her, then they kissed properly. It was rich and deep, so like the night before; they clung to each other. 'Billy it was so close, so close, I have this letter explaining things from Mr Furl, except...' He stopped, *He doesn't know I know*, she thought.

'He was you' she whispered.

Then they both broke into laughter – it was so surreal. He nodded. 'He said that it was him that you where going out with!' she grinned at him.

'My letter said to come here; we have to keep some of the consequences of the timeline, apparently.'

She nodded. 'I haven't finished reading mine,' she said. They walked back over to her tree stump and she began to read once more,

The Zema where initially seen as a threat, even though Billy was the only person they had killed. Half of the problem was that they felt guilty over her death and had acted too furtively and cautiously when talking to the humans. Due to their absorption of her feelings and memories they seemed incapable of communicating with anyone other than Dan. Once this was established, he

was made their ambassador. It was all going fine until they showed him his own abilities; they only ever spoke telepathically as it was. The disaster had come when he had linked to them. He saw Melissa, saw her hitting Billy, jeering at her, making her think that he didn't want her. He felt Billy's shame and pain; he saw her life, he saw that night. He had grown angry and hated Melissa; Hated her beyond reason, but he was linked to the aliens, and as he thought of crushing the life out of her for what she had done, that is exactly what happened. The murder of a well-loved super model was linked to the Aliens; Dan really could no longer cope, he was now a double murderer, as far as he was concerned. Earth declared war on the Zema, a stupid war that Earth could not win. Luckily the Zema would not fight; they took the hollow shell of Dan, a Dan on a cocktail of drugs, a self destructive Dan, and left. They cared for Dan, but the Earth was not apart of the - that damned blanked word again! And as a result, it was destroyed. *Shit!* she thought, *Oh my god!* It said it was too complicated to go into in detail. Dan was sent back in time to save her, with a communication cube to explain how to not kill the first human they established contact with.

'Oh my god', she whispered again. Dan held her hand. 'We must make contact with them, my letter said they had run various versions of our future and it has to be you who is first contact and then me as ambassador,' he blushed, 'its because of our strong emotional connection or something and a strong latent ability, though it doesn't say what that ability is.' Billy suspected that it was telepathy. Really it had to be that sort of thing but this was already way too sci fi and she was scared. She had to make contact with aliens that could kill her! In fact, aliens that *had* killed her!

‘We also have to watch out for Melissa, apparently.’ She could tell by his tone that he did not know that in the original timeline he had killed her; she wondered if she’d ever tell him. ‘She will try to kill you out of jealousy, it says in my letter, ‘ they looked at each other solemnly. ‘I have to be the ambassador so that I can come back in time, though it’s now not going to be the same story, is it?’ He asked. She agreed.

‘Oh, I lost my virginity to a man who doesn’t exist, who will never exist!’ she said flushing as she realised what she had just confessed.

He grinned at her, ‘Well we’ll get to take each other’s, just a couple of decades apart.’

‘You’re a virgin?’ she asked, shocked.

‘Yes,’ he looked down and blushed. They were being amazingly frank with each other.

‘But Melissa?’

‘Melissa is screwed in the head, Billy.’

‘But you’re also upper sixth form!’

‘So?’

‘Well, I thought everyone in the upper sixth had, you know, done it.’ She was blushing now.

‘I’m only five months older than you, silly!’ He playfully tousled her tangle of too-curly hair.

‘So what now?’ she asked.

‘We wait to make first contact.’ Their hands entwined, they waited, both aware that a huge responsibility had been laid upon their shoulders.

‘Hey,’ she said, ‘what if we split up!’

‘Err?’ he asked.

‘Well, will you bother to come and save me?’ she half-joked.

‘Mmm, well that’s see actually I think I can’t be bothered.’ He grinned at her. She punched him playfully. Suddenly a

light chiming began, it was familiar to her, she saw the golden tendrils coming towards them, she was nervous but she wasn't afraid anymore. He hugged her tighter, and she was safe.

Poetry

1. The Human Creed

The sky bloomed a pregnant pause
Sickly in its gestation
As the world shuddered beneath
Fear clung
Choking populations
In their own effluent
The stars pin wheeled around
Obscuring the clouds
As the world waited
Crimes of history
Lay as grimy stains
On Mother Natures pinafore
A mushroom enveloped the weather
And the pause was broken
It was an annihilation
Civilisations
Culmination

Melted skin,
Melted bone,
Melted metal

Long, slow or fast
Humans breed destruction of self

2. The Mask of History

The Mask of History
Is thick and sweet
Sugar coated massacre
Covering up injustice
Offering the simplistic stylised view

It is a mask of deception
A mask of power and lies
It is the war cry: Remember!
And the Amnestist pledge

The Mask of History
Is carved from human pain
Formed by arrogance
And the whims of those drunk
With power

It is the mask of tyranny
A mask of hope
It is the radicals of freedom
And the chaos of order

The Mask of History
Is a fragmented ghost
Of stories told untrue
A way to summarise events
Too complex
It is narrative to life

It is a mask that doesn't work
A mask to hide the scars
It is the wounding implement
And the bandage that binds

The Mask of History
Shows us heros and cowards
Lets us see
Movements of troops
Without the tears
In their eyes or
the smell of rotting flesh

It is the mask of simplicity
A mask to stop feeling
It is without emotion
Our emotional sync

The Mask of History
Remember it well
Look through the statistics
To the people who live
Scared, hungry, dying, enslaved

But then stand back
Put on the The Mask of History
See the trends align
Make decisions wisely
A mask has holes
Through those holes lurk the eyes
Of our triumphs
Our disasters
All the things that makes us this
Strange creature of humanity

From it we should learn
Destruction of self
Should lay deader than the memory
Of valour and metallic twang

Blood of the multitude
Churned into mud
Charred to black ruin
Left in pestilence to die

Remember, learn
Look through the lies
People, humanity
Strive a new
Or perish darkly

3. Dreams of the Phoenix

Shift these dreams
In a parabolic curve
Away from me
Into orbit
Around a closed mind
Until the orbit decays
And the dreams
Come home
With a crash
Destroying themselves
Annihilating those
Who betrayed them
These dreams
Are dangerous things
Until new growth
From the ruins
Chaos arises
Sowing seeds
Of things greater yet
My dreams

Our dreams
Build new worlds
Holding onto hope
For soon the end
Necessitates the beginning
Dreams of the Phoenix

4. Burning Books

An idea is creeping into my mind
This concept is bleeding me dry
Bleaching my soul to dust
Carving loveliness into nothing

A vision is stealing rational thought
Turning the good to turgid insipidness
Leadership whips to spoil
Leaving people and lands boldly strewn

A nightmare is building out the hate
Filling the belly of the best
As yet untamed
Bubbling with grief that can destroy
Leaching humanity from it's core

A cycle is beginning
Blaming, hating and religious creed
It begins with books and ends with people
Hold it together and no one is free

A pyre is belching a column in the sky
Smoke dirty as a sewage overflow
How many people will be maimed

For Pride and Glory and the Political Visions

5. Reincarnation

Locked in the centre
Vibrating through the mind
Through the soul
Eons pass
Night folds to twilight
Pain dims in the story of birth
Rhythm nature, nature rhythm
The cycle begins
The cycle ends within itself
Pitch building
Fear of the unknown
Growing, diminishing
Towards the end
Towards the beginning
Black, white, red, black, blue, yellow, bold
Glowing as of light
From within
Pictures of the mind
Pictures of the soul
Pictures of worlds
Growing small, growing large
Inside and out

6. A Wrong Cascade

Trees dark against an orange sky
Grey pall in the twilight
Ash blanket smothers
Water fall of fire

Flowing the wrong way
A staircase, burnt
Bottom too top

7. Chaos

A butterfly stirred within my curious hand
Hesitant to take the offered nectar
Golden, amber, sweet
Its tongue long and curled appeared
Lapping gently with distraction

I looked up at the sign
Butterflies for sale, \$12
Wings translucent in half dream light
Shimmer, golden-blue
It walked on insect legs tickling my finger

The drone of its brethren could be heard
Pressing against crystal cages
Rainbows glittered fleetingly
Dust beaten to the ground - luxuriant in growth
An angry tide: waiting

'I'll take this one' the teller nods
A golden leash of fine spun silk
I decline the offer and pay with jewels
Coloured rock ice - for a little chaos

Outside a red sky over silver sand
I look to Chaos and open my hand
Blue glittered fleetingly
Freedom I whispered

A breeze blew it away

8. Galactic Death Throes

The Dead Galaxy
Hung in the Vacuum
A dark remnant
Of a glittering time
A ghostly structure
Where the cogs seized
Where the fire died
Where there was an
end to annihilation
And the star birth

The cycle broken
the whisper of creation
Silenced

It drifted
Dense in blackness
With the Eater of Light
Still beating at its core
The only thing that
breathed motion
a deathly life
An eater of worlds
Super massive galactic
Cannibal forever
Hungry

It is the After Life
And the Gate to Hell

For the Stellar Host
That once shone so brightly

9. Dark Geometry

The noose is the shape of a section through a cone that
bisects the apex
The Bomber cuts a black triangle through the air
The gas mask is a cacophony of curves, a new
topography for the face
The tank is the home of stacked parallelograms
The bow is a semicircle cut in half by cylindrical arrow
topped by piercing cone
The dagger is an isosceles triangle used for dissecting
the heart of man

10. Stars

In the Beginning
The stars where beautiful
And serene
But then the moon appeared
Scattering crumbs
of Self
in their paths
They tasted and became hungry
Seething with desire
Angry with avarice
at each other
The throng moved as one
Distorted were their
pretty faces
as they became the Doom

They fell upon the moon
Who died without a sound
Distended became stomachs
feasting greedily
They became heavy
Crashing through the sky
They lay in puddles of destruction
Until the children found them
and cradled them
Giving them to their parents
To wind
They disgorged the moon
Which the older young
Threw to the sky
It coalesced and was joyous
The stars played
And danced
until all the lines of hate
that had creased their faces
where gone
And then in happiness
they drifted back to their vault
Where they sat in
Companionship
with the moon

11. The Music

The still sad music of humanity
Pulsed in my ears, making them
Bleed with insincerity
I cried to the requiem
Of their freedom,

Dirged in drum beats
Of heart

The harmony of life
Split me asunder
And poured my entrails
On the ground
Taken as cat gut -
They were used...

To string the bow
That played
The music
Of Humanity

12. Beginnings

Beginnings - times when the balance shifts
As the chaos of annihilation settles to new order
A beginning
Never *the* beginning
A wheel turning with star strewn spokes
Twisting renewal into death pangs
Stretching the twilight distinction
Between the two
A change of form
A change of state
Beginning? End? Transformation
The same from different angles viewed
Misconstrued as distinct
Life from decay, decay from life
Beginnings rearrange that is all.

13. Insectile Humans

Insects buzz
The crowd
Drones of summer
hedge in all reason
And
One shout
Takes us down
Insectile humans
Creating our own
Eradication
With
Toxic filled nests
Feasting till
Starvation
The human creature
Locust
Wasp
Cockroach
Fly
Insectile buzz
Human annihilation
with
Extermination of kind

14. Enunciating Sound Bites

Enunciating soundbites
For nihilistic consumption
By media masses
Leads too
Stressed out starlets with

Brains bashed forward
As they Sing down
Depressive destruction
Of their time

15. The Slippery Slope

Selfish human consumption
Depleting natural resources
Carrying extinction
Disguised as advancement

16. Cyclic

Heavy bruise horizon
Dripping blood
Of soldiers trapped in time
Skittering through the world
Bashing out brains
To decorate the pavement
Again and again and again

17. This Uneasy Eden

Predator in the Coral Jungle
Abundant, hungry
Always hungry
Prey in the Coral Jungle
Scared, in fear
Always in fear
A paradise of perpetual hell
An edge world

Finely balanced
Between the starving
And the eaten

Make it paradise true
Shift the paradigm
Remove the predator
Remove the hunger
Remove the fear
Remove the edge
The prey rejoice
No longer scared
No longer hunted
Rainbow flashes
Flitting everywhere
And killing
They kill
This Uneasy Eden

Bleached to the bone
Rainbow seas
White skeletons
Ghosts of what was before
No hunger
No fear
No lie
In this Uneasy Eden

18. Friend Jupiter

Jupiter
Sitting there
Protector

Shielding us from rocky storms
Or
Sinister betrayer
Sling-shooting armageddon
Towards us
A Projectile wraith
For your rocky brethren
Nestled near the sun
What will the maths show
Which way will the simulation swing
Gaseous Giants - Benevolent gods
Or Destroyers of Worlds
Wrapped in jealousy
That their own embryonic systems
Lay aborted, half formed in decaying rings

19. Prophecy

Sooth Sayers
Ides of March
Delphic Oracle
Prophet
Clairvoyant
Witch
Apocalypse
Date Change
Dooms Day
Play
Armageddon
Bedlam
Nostradamus
Nemesis sky
Mayan

Astrology
Numerology
Age dies
Scientists cry
Politician says
Cassandra lie
The end is nigh
Are we about to die?
Beware
Self fuelling
Trance dance
glance chance
End of the World?
Or the end of...

The world as we know it
Information streams
Dreams
Futurologists
Sings
Hive mind
Life extension
Space exploration
The Drawn is coming

20. Star Stuff

Star stuff filtered through the cosmos
Star stuff smaller than dust
Hurtling away from explosive stella deaths

Star stuff heavy metal elements of choice
Star stuff light hydrogen and helium in plasma soup

Colliding, destroying, reforming
Different atoms to be
Diffusing out from red giant expansion
Layers of reaction
Different star mechanisms for different elements
Star stuff permeating the void
Drifting away from it's crucible bed of origin

Star stuff amalgamated clouds, a nursery shroud
Nebulae of new star birth and planetary spheres
Spinning in eccentric concentric dance

One planet of star stuff
Still pummelled by larger bits of star dust
A planet like all made of star stuff
A planet were the inorganic began to replicate
A planet were star stuff became organic
Became something more, became organised into
organisms

Star stuff alive
Star stuff crawling on beaches of star dust
With elements of stella origins making up the cellular core

Star stuff walk
Star stuff talk
Star stuff refines elements from stella explosions
And send a rocket to the stars
Star stuff has been watching the starts since it first
became aware
Now it is time for star stuff to truly see what is out there

About the Author

Sarah lives in Gloucester in England with her husband, two daughters and many rescue pets. She is known as the scientific artist or artistic scientist and has a degree in Geology from Imperial College London, though she has spent the last decade pursuing the arts and crafts and building her poetry persona Saffy The Purple Poet.

Having won awards from a diverse range of organisations for her works such as the European Space Agency and the Creative Olympics, Sarah has a keen interest in feeding her work back into the public domain to help inspire others through science and/or art.

For those who really want to know she is obsessed with blogging, the colour purple, dragons and pizza - though sushi is starting to rival the old favourite!